


SUNNY BOY IN THE SNOW



RAMY ALLISON WHITE



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Sunny Boy hurled his ball as hard as he could
Sunny Boy in the Snow

Frontispiece

SUNNY BOY IN THE SNOW

BY
RAMY ALLISON WHITE

Author of
"SUNNY BOY IN THE COUNTRY," "SUNNY BOY AND
HIS PLAYMATES," "SUNNY BOY AND HIS
BIG DOG," ETC.

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JOHN M. FOSTER

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SUNNY BOY IN THE SNOW

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SUNNY BOY IN THE SNOW

CHAPTER I

WINTER BEGINS

WHAT was that hit me on the nose?" cried Ruth Baker.

"Nothing," her brother Nelson said, trying to dig in the ground and not succeeding because the ground was frozen hard.

"I don't think anything hit you on the nose, Ruth," said Sunny Boy politely.

Sunny Boy Horton was always polite to Ruth and once when she told her mother so, Nelson said the reason Sunny Boy was polite was because he wasn't Ruth's brother.

"Don't you have to be polite to me, just because you're my brother?" Ruth had asked.

"It's like this," said Nelson. "I'm polite some

of the time, but Sunny Boy always is; brothers don't have to be polite all the time."

This wasn't a very good excuse, but in justice to Nelson it may be said that he was usually polite to his sister. Only he certainly did not have as much patience as Sunny Boy had.

"Something did hit me on the nose!" Ruth was insisting now. "I guess I know when something hits me on the nose."

Ruth wasn't always polite, either—she often forgot to be. Her mother said that might be the reason why Nelson was forgetful, too.

"Ow!" cried Ruth. "There it is again! It hits me right spang on my nose!"

But this time Sunny Boy felt something hit him on *his* nose. Something cold and wet. It stung, too. In a moment he felt it again.

"It's snow!" he shouted in delight. "Ruth—Nelson—look! It's snowing!"

Well, there is nothing much more exciting than to be out in the first snow storm. No wonder Sunny Boy and Nelson and Ruth began to

do a funny little dance. They hopped and skipped and held out their hands and let the cold wet snow fall into their small palms. Nelson took off his cap and let the snow flakes float down upon his hair.

"Nelson Baker, you put your cap on this minute," said Harriet.

She had raised the pantry window a tiny crack and was speaking through this opening. Harriet lived in Sunny Boy's house, and as the children were playing in Sunny Boy's yard, Nelson thought he'd better do as Harriet said.

"It's snowing, Harriet!" called Sunny Boy, capering wildly. "Harriet, it's snowing—did you know it?"

Harriet chuckled.

"I know it now," she laughed. "I suppose you're hoping it will be a blizzard."

"Wouldn't that be great?" said Nelson, as he put on his cap and Harriet closed the window and went away. "Suppose it snows all night and all to-morrow and all the next day!"

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"Then the snow would be up to the tops of the houses, wouldn't it?" Sunny Boy imagined.

"Oh-oo, I wouldn't like that," objected Ruth, blowing on her fingers, for they were cold. "I don't like too much snow. It makes my feet cold."

"Now don't go and let your feet get cold right away," Nelson warned her. "Every time we go sledding I have to bring you home because your feet get cold."

"They're not cold now, are they, Ruth?" asked Sunny Boy cheerfully. "Your feet aren't cold now, are they?"

Ruth looked down at her small tan shoes.

"No, they're not cold," she admitted, "but they're not exactly warm. If it snows enough, can we make ice-cream, Sunny Boy?"

"Oh, it has to snow lots more than this," said Sunny Boy. "It has to be clean snow, too—you can't scrape it off the steps and eat it. Harriet says that is no way to do."

Sunny Boy and Nelson and Ruth looked at

the back steps. It had snowed enough so that the thinnest layer of snow covered the steps—it wasn't very white snow, either. Sunny Boy ran his finger over the top step, Nelson scraped the middle step, and Ruth rubbed her mitten over the lowest step. Three little piles of dirty gray film were the result.

"You see?" said Sunny Boy. "It has to snow real thick and deep, to make ice-cream. You mustn't scrape the step at all—just take it off the top, like cake icing."

"It isn't deep enough for coasting, either," Nelson declared, squinting up at the sky as though he hoped to see a very heavy snowstorm coming down.

He had to shut his eyes, for the wet flakes spatted them sharply.

"Gee, it really is snowing!" he murmured, as though he had not been sure about it before.

The kitchen door opened suddenly and something dark and heavy bounced against Sunny Boy, who was sitting with his back to the house.

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"Toby!" he cried joyfully, while Nelson and Ruth fell on the dog and hugged him, both together.

Toby was used to such affection. He liked it. Sunny Boy and all his friends loved Toby very much and the big dog never minded when they pulled his hair or squeezed him tightly or tried to ride on his back. When he was tired of too much attention, he simply walked away to some quiet corner and lay down and went to sleep. As soon as he was rested, he would get up and start to hunt for Sunny Boy and ask him, as plainly as a dog could talk, to play with him.

"Maybe Toby never saw any snow before," said Nelson thoughtfully.

Toby sat down between his small master and Nelson, and Ruth went to scraping the lowest step again. Another coating of snow had covered it by this time.

"Oh, I guess Toby has seen snow before this," said Sunny Boy, "he's a grown-up dog, so he must have seen snow before now."

"Well, maybe he lived in California," Nelson persisted. "If he lived in California, he never saw any snow."

"But he didn't," said Sunny Boy. "Toby isn't a California dog. He lived with Mrs. Ponder on a farm. Daddy bought him from Mrs. Ponder for me."

"I forgot that," Nelson admitted. "Then perhaps he has seen snow before this—maybe he knows how to pull a sled, Sunny Boy."

Nelson had a very hopeful nature, when he was once started to be hopeful. As soon as he made up his mind that Toby had seen snow, he also decided that the dog could pull a sled through heavy drifts.

"It would be fun if Toby could pull me to school," suggested Ruth, looking up from her scraping.

"You'd fall off," Nelson said. "It takes a boy to drive a dog that's harnessed to a sled."

"Girls drove Toby when he was pulling the cart," said Sunny Boy mildly. "Don't you re-

member, Nelson, we had Toby harnessed to my wagon and he earned money for Aunt Bessie's fair?"

"Yes, I remember," Nelson replied. "But pulling a sled is different. A sled tips over easier than a wagon."

"Say, Sunny Boy," said Ruth, who wasn't disposed to worry about a sled before there was snow enough to use it on, "couldn't we let Toby eat some of this snow?"

"What for?" Sunny Boy asked promptly.

"To see if it is good enough for ice-cream," explained Ruth. "He could eat it and then if it didn't make him sick, we'd know it wouldn't make us sick."

"Dogs," Sunny Boy said seriously, "eat different things from us. Toby eats dog biscuits and bones. Suppose the snow doesn't make him sick—how do we know it won't make us sick?"

"You could ask Harriet before we eat it," said Ruth sensibly. "I just want to see if Toby likes snow."

Sunny Boy was curious to find out for himself, and so was Nelson. So they each rolled up a little roll of the wet snow and Sunny Boy tried first.

"Good snow, Toby!" he said. "Eat it all up!"

He held out the snow to the dog who sniffed at it cautiously, licked it once, and then gulped it suddenly. But almost as soon as he felt it in his mouth, Toby spit it out.

"He doesn't like snow," Sunny Boy decided.

Nelson tried and so did Ruth, but though Toby politely took their offerings into his mouth, he just as quickly spit them out again.

"I don't believe a dog ever eats snow," said Sunny Boy. "Perhaps an Eskimo dog does, but Toby isn't an Eskimo dog."

The bare ground and the stubby brown grass in the yard were covered with snow by this time. Not, of course, a thick blanket of snow, but enough to make everything look white. The top of the fence was white, too, and the steps where Ruth had not scraped it dry, and the railing of

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the back porch had a ridge of snow on it that showed the children "how high" the snow really was, as Sunny Boy said.

"We can make a slide," he declared suddenly. "Mother doesn't like me to make them on the street, because when we stop playing the snow covers them up and all the old ladies fall down on them. Here in the back yard there won't be any old ladies walking. Come on, and we'll make a slide!"

He jumped up and ran down the steps and Toby followed him, barking wildly. Dogs know when their masters are excited and perhaps the cold, crisp air and the whirling snowflakes made Toby feel excited, too. He barked and bounced and leaped up on Sunny Boy and Nelson and Ruth, one after the other.

"His feet are wet!" said Ruth disapprovingly. "His feet are soaking wet, Sunny Boy. The snow sticks to them. Maybe Harriet won't let him go into the house, if his feet are wet. I should think she wouldn't."

“Ho, Harriet always lets Toby go into the house,” Sunny Boy replied confidently. “Almost always,” he added.

He began to make the slide. You know how to do it, too—you choose a long stretch of pavement and you start at the beginning and run and then slide just as far as your feet will obligingly carry you. The more you slide, the smoother the slide grows and by and by it is like glass.

Sunny Boy made his slide on the cross walk that went past the back steps and met the strip of walk that ran along the side of the house. He found that if he started at the cellar door and ran, he could slide almost the length of the cross walk and clear across the piece of the other walk where the two paths joined. All the walks in the back yard of Sunny Boy’s house were made of cement and they were fine and smooth for slides.

“Whoop-ee! Here I go!” sang Sunny Boy, looking very much like a Robin Redbreast, as he

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skimmed down his slide, his red sweater showing under his coat.

“Here I come!” shouted Nelson, following closely after him.

Ruth had to wait, for Toby dashed after the boys, but a minute later she, too, was sliding, her arms held out like little brown wings.

Then it was Sunny Boy’s turn again and he went away over to the other side of the yard, so as to get a good start. He ran as fast as he could and he gave an enthusiastic “Whoop-ee!” as his feet struck the icy slide and he felt himself going like the wind.

“Look out!” shouted Nelson quickly.

Sunny Boy had just time to see some one in a white coat, a heavy basket on his arm, come running down the other walk. Then, the next thing he knew, he had slid into the white-coated person and both went down with a crash.

CHAPTER II

HARRIET IS PARTICULAR

FOR a moment Sunny Boy was bewildered. His first thought was that he must have upset an old lady—old ladies, Sunny Boy remembered, were always complaining that slides were slippery and they did not like them.

“Oh-h, Sunny Boy!” Ruth Baker was crying. “Did you hurt yourself?”

Sunny Boy had gone down with a great thump, but he wasn’t hurt. As soon as he had struggled to his feet, he saw he had not bumped into an old lady.

“Where do you think you are going?” said a good-natured voice.

The grocery boy sat on the slide and looked at Sunny Boy. All around him were packages—one bag had broken and oranges were rolling

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out. Sunny Boy saw apples, too, and a bunch of carrots.

He knew the grocery boy very well. So did Ruth and Nelson Baker. The grocery boy's name was Bill, and he came every day to Sunny Boy's house and brought things for Harriet to cook for dinner.

"It's lucky," said the grocery boy, pretending to be very gruff indeed, "that there wasn't any eggs in this order. It would be a fine mess if there had been eggs in that basket."

"Where *is* the basket?" asked Sunny Boy.

Bill looked about him anxiously and scrambled to his feet.

"What do you know about that?" he said. "The basket's gone!"

The kitchen door opened and Harriet came out, a little three-cornered shawl she sometimes wore, draped over her head so she wouldn't take cold.

"What's the matter?" asked Harriet. "Is anything the matter, Sunny Boy?"

"I was sliding, and I slid into Bill. He dropped all the things," Sunny Boy explained.

"I should think he did," Harriet agreed. "Come, children, help pick up—my stars, look where the basket went!"

She pointed, and there was the basket in the furthest corner of the yard, thrown up against the fence.

Sunny Boy began to pick up the oranges—he was very fond of oranges—and Nelson and Ruth started to gather up the apples. Bill ran to rescue his basket, and Harriet tried to blow the snow off the carrots. It was snowing fast and steadily now.

If you have read the first volume of this series, you know who Sunny Boy was and you'll remember that his real name was Arthur Bradford Horton, and that he was named for his grandpa. He was called Sunny Boy because he was a cheerful boy and as happy as the days were long. It was in this first book, entitled "Sunny Boy in the Country," that he went to

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visit this dear grandpa of his and had a wonderful time on a real farm.

But, for that matter, Sunny Boy was always having good times—when he went to the seashore, and to New York City, when he began to go to school and when he went traveling with his daddy and his mother, he had such good times that he made other people have good times, too. That, you know, is one of the nicest things about cheerful children.

But perhaps Sunny Boy had “more fun,” as he himself would have said it, when his big dog Toby came to live with him. Sunny Boy had wanted a dog for a long time and in the book just before this one, called “Sunny Boy and His Big Dog,” Toby joined the Horton family. He was a very remarkable dog and other folks besides Sunny Boy thought so—the gypsies who stole him and the motion picture people who used Toby in their pictures thought he was a wonderful dog. Ruth and Nelson Baker—who lived next door to Sunny Boy—thought Toby was the

brightest dog that ever lived and it did seem as though he could do everything that Sunny Boy asked him to do. Bill, the grocery boy, liked Toby, too. He was always asking Sunny Boy when Toby would "act" in another motion picture.

It didn't take long to pick up all the things that had fallen out of Bill's basket—not with Sunny Boy and Ruth and Nelson and Harriet working to put them back again—and in a few minutes Bill was following Harriet into the kitchen to put the groceries on the table.

"Lucky the coffee comes in a tin can," Sunny Boy heard him say to Harriet. "If you spilled coffee on the ground it would take you the rest of your life to pick it up."

"Wipe your feet," was Harriet's answer to this. "Wipe 'em good and clean. I hate to see a clean floor all tracked up."

Sunny Boy and Ruth and Nelson went back to sliding. It was "just right" they all agreed and when Bill came running down the steps with

his empty basket on his arm a few minutes later, he took four slides, too—to keep in practise, he explained.

“The next place I go to, another boy may have a slide and come rushing into me,” said Bill. “If I am used to sliding myself, I can keep my balance better. There’s nothing like being prepared for winter accidents.”

Sunny Boy wished Bill would stay and practise sliding longer—he didn’t like to think of his being knocked down every yard he went into by boys and girls sliding on the slides they had made; but Bill said he must hurry and after his fourth slide he went whistling out of the yard.

“Is it four o’clock?” asked Ruth. “Mother said we must come home at four o’clock.”

“It’s about half past two,” Nelson said comfortably. “See how fast it’s snowing.”

“How can it be half past two when we don’t get out of school till quarter to three?” said Sunny Boy sensibly.

Nelson didn’t know, and when Sunny Boy

clattered up the back steps and put his head in at the kitchen door and asked Harriet what time it was, she said it was ten minutes past four!

"The snow will cover the slide all up," mourned Nelson.

"We can sweep it off," Sunny Boy declared. "I'll sweep it off first thing in the morning, Nelson. A slide doesn't spoil if you sweep it off."

Nelson and Ruth went home reluctantly—their mother said sometimes that she was afraid they thought they lived at Sunny Boy's house instead of in their own—and then Sunny Boy and Toby decided to go in, too.

"Sunny Boy!" called Harriet, as soon as she heard Sunny Boy open the kitchen door. "Sunny Boy, don't let Toby in the house."

"Why, Harriet! can't he come in?" Sunny Boy asked, much surprised. "Can't Toby come in and get warm, Harriet? Why can't he?"

Harriet stood in the middle of the kitchen floor. She could see Toby's head, for he stood

just behind Sunny Boy and was pushing his nose under his master's arm. Toby liked Harriet's nice warm kitchen.

"He can't come in because his feet are a disgrace," said Harriet firmly. "His feet are soaking wet. And just look at the snow and ice sticking to him. The porch is plenty good enough for a dog with feet like that."

Sunny Boy looked at Toby. There *was* snow on his feet and some of it had melted on the long hair and then frozen again, so that he had little icicles on his legs.

"But he'll freeze, Harriet," Sunny Boy urged. "Toby will freeze to death. He's shivering now."

"Dogs don't freeze to death as easy as that," replied Harriet. "I'm more likely to freeze myself, if you keep that door open much longer, Sunny Boy. Let Toby stay on the porch and he'll be all right. If it's too cold to-night, you can take him down cellar before you go to bed."

Sunny Boy closed the door, but he stayed outside with Toby. As a rule, Toby was allowed to

go wherever he pleased in the house. He was a very well-behaved dog and as clean as a pin—Harriet said so. But that was before there had been any snow. Naturally, Toby couldn't help getting his feet wet in the snow.

"I'll get the broom," Sunny Boy decided, "and sweep you a nice place, Toby."

He knew where Harriet kept the broom, and he slipped into the kitchen and found it while she was busy in another part of the house.

"Poor Toby!" said Sunny Boy to himself. "He can't help it, if he gets his feet all snowy. He hasn't any shoes to take off—he hasn't even any overshoes."

That gave Sunny Boy a new thought. Why didn't dogs have overshoes? he wondered.

"If Toby had overshoes, he wouldn't get his feet wet and then he could come into the house," he thought, beginning to sweep around Toby who was lying down on the back porch.

It really didn't do much good to sweep, for the wind was blowing the snow on to the porch

much faster than Sunny Boy could sweep it off.

"I guess I'd better make you some overshoes," said Sunny Boy to the big dog.

Toby thumped his tail pleasantly. He didn't know what overshoes were, but he did know that Sunny Boy took the best of care of him and he loved his young master dearly.

"You stay out here and wait—I'll be back in a minute," said Sunny Boy, shouldering his broom and marching into the kitchen.

"Harriet!" he called. "Where's the rag bag?"

Harriet was fussing around in the pantry now. She answered without stopping the stream of sugar she was measuring in a cup.

"The rag bag's down cellar, hanging on a nail," she said.

Sunny Boy hurried down cellar. He found the bag on a nail, just as Harriet had said. Anything that was in the rag bag, Sunny Boy might have without asking—he knew that.

"I suppose," he thought, feeling around among the rags, "I ought to get real heavy

stuff for overshoes. I wish I had some rubber."

Now and then it does seem as though there were fairies about. Lots of times Sunny Boy made wishes that didn't come true, but once in a great while he would make a wish and it would come true before he could say "Jack Robinson!"

This was one of those rare times.

No sooner had Sunny Boy said, "I wish I had some rubber," than he saw a basket of trash under the cellar stairs. He knew the basket was put there to wait for trash day—in the winter the street cleaning department of Centronia, the city where Sunny Boy lived, collected trash only once a week. Friday was trash day and to-day was only Monday.

"Why," said Sunny Boy, staring at the trash basket, "there's some rubber!"

Right on top of the trash basket was an old rubber hot water bottle and two old stair treads—you know the rubber mats that are sometimes tacked on the tops of steps to keep people from slipping. Sunny Boy remembered that the hot

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water bottle had leaked the week before and his mother had said she must throw it away. And the rubber stair mats had been on the back stairs, but the carpenter man had come and taken them all up and put new ones down in place of them.

"I can make some dandy overshoes," said Sunny Boy joyfully.

He took the rubber mats and the hot water bottle and went back upstairs. He had scissors of his own—nice blunt ones—and he had been saving string for a long, long time, so for once in his life he had plenty of that.

"Are you going out again, Sunny Boy?" asked Harriet when she saw him still with his overcoat and cap on. "It's getting dark and your mother will be home pretty soon—hadn't you better stay in?"

"I'll be right out on the porch," Sunny Boy said. "I have to make something, Harriet."

Toby was glad to see Sunny Boy again. He had licked most of the icicles from his feet and legs, but they were still pretty wet.

“Wait till you see what I’m going to make for you,” Sunny Boy told him. “Rubber overshoes! Then you can go in the house all you want to. And you won’t scratch the floor, either. After your feet are dry, I’ll take them off.” Sunny Boy meant he would take the overshoes off. “Then the next time it snows you can put them on the way I do my rubber boots and go out and play with me and have dry feet, too.”

CHAPTER III

TOBY'S OVERSHOES

SUNNY BOY sat down with his back against the house and Toby snuggled up against him. It was rather difficult to make overshoes for a dog, Sunny Boy discovered, especially so as he had never made overshoes before. He had to measure first, and Toby insisted on wiggling his feet. Then, when he had the rubber cut out, he found that the pieces slipped off the dog's feet as fast as he tied the strings around them.

"I'll have to punch holes," decided Sunny Boy. "I'll have to punch holes in the rubber and run the strings through."

He used his scissors to make little holes in the pieces of rubber and then he used them again to poke the pieces of string through. At last he had four flat pieces of rubber that drew up to

form little cups when the strings were tied.

“Now you have to stand up,” said Sunny Boy to Toby. “I can’t put overshoes on you while you’re lying down.”

Toby obediently stood up. He looked a little puzzled when Sunny Boy, panting and very red in the face from so much stooping over, tied on those queer rubber cups, but Toby didn’t really mind it until he started to walk.

“Come on in,” said Sunny Boy invitingly, and Toby followed him to the kitchen door.

Poor Toby looked at his feet, which must have felt twice as heavy as usual. He shook each one, but Sunny Boy in alarm told him to stop.

“You’ll shake your overshoes off,” scolded Sunny Boy, “and then Harriet won’t let you in.

“Harriet,” he went on, opening the door cautiously and putting in his head, “Toby has on overshoes now—is it all right to let him in the house?”

There was some one else standing in the kitchen with Harriet—a pretty young woman in

a black fur coat and a bright pink rose pinned on the fluffy collar. This was Sunny Boy's mother and she smiled at the little boy and his anxious face.

"Oh, Harriet, I never saw dog overshoes," said Mrs. Horton. "Do let Toby come in, so I can see what they look like."

Harriet laughed and Sunny Boy knew that meant "Yes," so he opened the door wider and Toby scuffled in.

"Why, Sunny Boy!" cried his mother, beginning to laugh. "Why, Sunny Boy Horton!"

She sat down in one of the chairs and Harriet leaned against the table and they both laughed and laughed.

"It's because Toby's feet were wet, Mother," Sunny Boy explained. "Harriet didn't want him to make the kitchen floor dirty. See, Mother, they are rubber overshoes. I made them."

"They're grand, Sunny Boy," said Harriet quickly. "Just grand. I never saw overshoes on a dog before and that's what makes me laugh.

But they're grand shoes and they'll keep him from making a single mark—if he doesn't kick them off."

"Well, I don't think he likes them much," Sunny Boy confided. "But he will, when he gets used to them. I want to show them to Daddy when he comes home."

Toby scuffed around in his overshoes—Sunny Boy followed him about the house and put on a shoe as fast as it came off—and Mr. Horton found the dog still wearing them when he came home to dinner.

"Now that's what I call a fine scheme," said Sunny Boy's daddy, shaking the snow off his coat as he stood in the hall. "A fine scheme, Sunny Boy. You're the one who thought of it, I know."

Sunny Boy beamed and he showed his daddy just how the shoes were made and told him how he had made them. After dinner that night Toby was allowed to take off his shoes, for his feet were dry by that time.

"But I'll save them," declared Sunny Boy. "They're good overshoes and Toby ought to get a lot of wear out of them."

Harriet always said that when she was looking over things to go in the rag bag. The things that had a lot of wear in them she never threw away.

The last thing Sunny Boy did that night before he hopped into bed was to look out of the window. It was still snowing.

The next morning, though, the snow had stopped. The sound of a shovel on the pavement woke Sunny Boy and he pattered over to the window. There was Barney Blake, the man who tended the furnace, busily cleaning the sidewalk.

"Oh, my, I guess I will have to wear my rubber boots," said Sunny Boy aloud.

As far as he could see, up and down the street, there was a blanket of beautiful white snow. One or two houses had their steps swept off, but as Barney took care of most of the furnaces on the block, he was also expected to clean most of the

walks and people waited for him to come and do it. So there were few steps and walks shoveled off so early in the morning.

Sunny Boy dressed as fast as he could and hurried down the stairs. His daddy was standing at the front window, watching for the paper boy, and Harriet, in the kitchen, was watching Toby through the back window.

Toby was rolling and tumbling in the snow and getting himself completely covered. Sunny Boy was quite discouraged.

"I wonder if he thinks I can make him a whole blanket to keep the snow off his back," he said to Harriet.

"I don't believe Toby is thinking anything about it," Harriet answered. "He's just getting his exercise. You know he isn't going to school to play with a lot of boys and run and jump and carry on. Poor Toby has to get what fun he can by himself."

Sunny Boy felt so sorry for Toby who had no one to play with him that he was half tempted

to go out into the yard and roll and tumble in the snow and pretend he was another dog. But Mrs. Horton came downstairs just then and the paper boy came and Harriet said that she thought she'd make the pancakes larger around than usual that morning, because if Sunny Boy had to plow his way through all that snow, he would need nourishment.

"I need nourishment, too, Harriet," said Mr. Horton. "I need a great deal of nourishment—did you fill the syrup jug?"

Harriet had filled the silver jug, and, my goodness, couldn't she make the best pancakes! Sunny Boy and his daddy thought there was nothing better in all the world than Harriet's pancakes, with butter and maple syrup on them. They always ate as many as she baked for them and they might have eaten even more than that, only Mrs. Horton thought that too many pancakes were not good for one.

"Not even grown-up people like Daddy?" Sunny Boy had asked her once.

"Not even for grown-up people like Daddy," she had said firmly.

After breakfast, Daddy Horton went off to his office and Sunny Boy had to get ready to go to school. School was most important for him this year, for he no longer went to Miss May Ford's private school—that was where he had gone when he first went to school. Ruth Baker went there now, but Sunny Boy went to the same public school Nelson Baker attended and he felt much older and almost grown up, sometimes.

"You'll need to bundle up warmly, Sunny Boy," said his mother. "I have an idea it is a pretty cold day out. Are you going to wear your rubber boots?"

"I think I'd better," Sunny Boy answered, sitting down on the floor beside the hall closet to put his boots on. "I have to go over some deep places, Mother."

He tugged at his boots till he had them on, then he put on his little brown windbreaker that Aunt Bessie had given to him on his last birth-

day. Then he had a scarf and an overcoat and a cap and his warm knitted brown gloves and there he was—a regular pudding of a boy, but looking so warm and rosy and comfortable, it was no wonder his mother and Harriet had to kiss him twice.

“Where’s my geography book?” asked Sunny Boy. “Where’s my clean handkerchief? Here ’tis. There’s Nelson! Don’t forget to let Toby come in and get warm when he shakes some snow off, will you, Harriet? Good-by, Mother!”

He hopped down the front steps and joined Nelson, who was waiting for him.

“Where’s Ruth?” asked Sunny Boy when he reached Nelson’s side.

“Ruth has a cold—she isn’t going to-day,” said Nelson, who also wore his rubber boots. “Say, isn’t this nice?”

Ruth usually went with the boys as far as the corner of the street where Miss Ford’s school was. Sunny Boy was sorry to hear she had a cold, but he and Nelson could jump into the big-

gest drifts now and make all the snowballs they chose, without having to remember that little girls hated to be tumbled about in the snow and didn't like snowballs to hit them ever, anywhere at all.

"I guess Mr. Lambert knew it was going to snow all right," said Nelson, as he and Sunny Boy tried jumping over each pile of snow they came to—the piles of snow were where the sidewalks had been cleaned.

"Yes, wasn't it funny he should talk about snowballs in the exercises yesterday morning?" Sunny Boy agreed.

Mr. Lambert was the principal of the public school and "in the exercises" as his pupils would persist in calling the morning assembly, he frequently surprised them by speaking to them about things which had not yet happened. Usually they did happen soon after he mentioned them—Nelson and Sunny Boy had noticed that.

"I think when you're a principal, you can see what is coming ahead," said Sunny Boy to

Harriet, who was always most interested in whatever happened at school.

“More likely,” replied Harriet, “it is that the same things happen in school about the same time every year. This Mr. Lambert knows what the boys and girls in his school did last year about this time and he can count on their doing the same thing this year. So if it is something he doesn’t like he steps in and tells them before it is time for it to happen again.”

Now the day before this snowy morning, there had not been a flake of snow on the ground. The sun was shining and no one was thinking of snow. Yet Mr. Lambert, as soon as the first hymn was finished, had stood up and told his school that he did not wish to hear of any of his pupils throwing snowballs on their way to school or on their way home from school that winter.

“You’re under school direction from the time you start for school until you arrive home at the end of the day,” said the principal, “and I do not want any one to come to me and complain

that a boy or a girl from the Marion Avenue Public School has thrown a snowball and struck a pedestrian. Please remember."

And that very afternoon it had begun to snow!

"Perhaps if you don't hit a pedes—a person, it is all right," said Sunny Boy hopefully.

"No, it isn't," Nelson contradicted. "Last year a boy threw a ball and it didn't hit any one, but a man ducked and lost his hat and he was just as mad as though he had been hit. He told Mr. Lambert and the boy was kept in."

"I don't see why a man should care just because he lost his hat, do you?" questioned Sunny Boy.

"No, of course not. But grown-up people are funny," replied Nelson, with an important air of having settled the matter.

"Maybe," murmured Sunny Boy slowly. Then he added: "But I don't believe my daddy nor Grandpa Horton would make a fuss over losing a hat. Nor your father either, Nelson."

Then, suddenly, Nelson shouted and began to run.

Sunny Boy looked up, startled. Then he, too, began to run. Just a block away there was a battle royal going on, a snowball fight between the "big boys"—the boys in the grammar grades of the Marion Avenue school.

CHAPTER IV

THE SNOWBALL FIGHT

SUNNY BOY wished he had left his boots at home. He couldn't run half as fast in them as he could without them. Nelson, too, was having difficulty, and once he stumbled and went flat. But snow is a mighty fine feather bed on which to fall, and Nelson was up and away again and hardly knew he had tripped.

"Fight! Fight!" he was shouting. "Come on, Sunny Boy! Gee, look at Jack Spratt!"

"I'm coming," Sunny Boy gasped, his face crimson from running. "I'm coming—you don't have to shout at me so."

But Nelson didn't know he was shouting. He was so excited that he didn't know he was saying a word. And when they reached the scene of the snowball fight he stood so close to the energetic

Jack Spratt that that boy's elbow, when he drew back his arm to throw a ball, struck Nelson squarely on his nose.

"You kids keep out of the way," snapped Jack Spratt, who was excited, too.

The school was on the next block and from where he stood Sunny Boy could see the iron fence that went around the big yard, a ball of snow on top of each iron post.

Jack Spratt was a boy in the seventh grade and was older than most of the boys in his room. His real name was not Jack, but no one had ever heard what it was. They called him Jack Spratt because of the old Mother Goose rhyme.

The snowball fight seemed to be between the seventh and eighth grades and all the boys were much older than Sunny Boy and Nelson, who were in the primary grade. There was a fringe of the younger lads and a few little girls standing on the curb.

"Gee, this is a peach of a fight," sighed Nelson in perfect bliss. "Jack Spratt just can't stand

Handy Lee because he's always talking about going to West Point when he grows up. Handy's got the best boys on his side, but you can see Jack is packing his balls."

Sunny Boy knew Handy Lee. He was a merry, dark-haired chap in the highest grammar grade, younger and considerably shorter than Jack Spratt, and a leader on the playground. He and Jack seldom were on the same "side" in any game and it was not surprising to find them at present leading opposing forces in a fight of this kind.

Sunny Boy had turned to look up the street when, whang! a snowball hit him with terrific force on his ear. It was a "packed" ball, too, and the tears came into his eyes, for the pain was stinging.

Sunny Boy forgot that he was not "in" the fight. He forgot that the younger boys were not supposed to be on one side or the other. He forgot everything except that somebody had hit him on the ear with a snowball and that he

couldn't rest until he had hit some one else in return.

He stooped down and gathered up two handfuls of snow. Jack Spratt had a little heap of balls at his feet, but Sunny Boy preferred to make his own snowballs. Nelson, too, had been struck in the back by a ball, and he was going hot-foot into the affair. As Sunny Boy straightened up to fling his ball, Nelson swung round and sent a ball with such good aim that it landed full in the face of one of Handy Lee's "army."

Sunny Boy hurled his ball as hard as he could and had the satisfaction of seeing it strike Harry Lane, one of Jack Spratt's fighters, who was chasing after an enemy shouting that he would wash his face for him just as soon as he caught him.

"Good work, Sunny Boy! Do it again!" shouted several voices.

Sunny Boy was surprised to see Oliver Dunlap, Perry Phelps and Jimmie Butterworth—

friends of his and who were in his classroom—standing on the curb.

“Hit him again, Sunny Boy!” cried Jimmie Butterworth.

Sunny Boy stooped down to gather up more snow. Just as he stood up, ready to hurl his ball, Jack Spratt doubled up like a pretzel, straightened out again and let a heavy packed snowball fly.

The next moment there was a cry of pain, and a shout of dismay from several boys.

“It’s Mrs. Speck!” some one whispered. “Oh-h, it’s old Mrs. Speck. I guess she’s dead!”

Sunny Boy knew Mrs. Speck. So did his mother and Harriet. She was an old woman who went from door to door with a basket on her arm. In this basket were pretty iron-holders she made and sold. Mrs. Horton never bought an iron holder, no matter how much she needed one, from any one else or from a store. She always waited for Mrs. Speck to come.

The boys, some of them, gathered around Mrs.

Speck. As they moved toward her, Sunny Boy had a glimpse of her lying flat in the snow and it frightened him because she looked as though she might be dead. Then some of them turned and scampered off to the school. However, most of them stayed and the little girls on the edge of the group kept pushing and shoving and whispering:

“What’s the matter? Who hit her? Is she killed?”

“You young heathen—somebody ought to shake you good and plenty!” said an angry voice close to Sunny Boy’s ear.

But the young milkman, to whom the voice belonged, wasn’t speaking to Sunny Boy. He had hold of Jack Spratt’s collar and he looked as though he might be making up his mind to shake him “good and plenty” the next minute.

“Who you talking to?” blustered Jack, trying to squirm away and not succeeding, because the young milkman in the red sweater had a very firm grip.

"I'm talking to you! You ought to have better sense than to get so wild over a snowball fight you can't see when an old lady's coming," said the milkman. "I don't believe in complaining when kids play in the streets, but they ought to pay a little attention to the rights of other folks."

Sunny Boy knew he was a milkman for he could see his horse and wagon standing on the other side of the street. Sunny Boy was listening to him, but at the same time he was watching Mrs. Speck. Some man had put his arm around her and lifted her up and all the children were glad to see she could look at them and put her hand up to her head where her hat ought to be. It wasn't there because it had fallen off. Sunny Boy saw it in the snow and he was going to dart forward and get it for her when he heard Jack Spratt say something that surprised him so much he couldn't move.

"I didn't throw that ball that hit the old woman," said Jack. "If you have to know

everything, it was that kid—the one in the brown coat. His name is Horton—Sunny Boy Horton.”

Nelson Baker had galloped up to the front row of the boys who stood staring at Mrs. Speck and he did not hear this. But a thin woman with her hair screwed back tightly under a pink cap and very big eyes behind her spectacles and large white teeth that looked to Sunny Boy *exactly* like the teeth of the wolf in Red Riding Hood, pushed through the group and glared at him.

“I saw the whole thing,” she said. “I was upstairs, airing my bedrooms, and I saw that boy throw the ball. It was the boy in the brown coat.”

“I didn’t!” cried Sunny Boy. “I did not throw a snowball and hit Mrs. Speck!”

“Don’t deny it,” said the woman. “Don’t you stand there and tell me to my face you didn’t throw that ball, because I saw you do it. And the minute I can get myself dressed, I’m going over to the school and speak to Mr. Lambert.

It's a living disgrace the way you children carry on as soon as snow comes. I dread the winter just on that account."

"Didn't I tell you?" said Jack Spratt, as she backed out and they saw her crossing the street toward her own house.

"Don't you care, kid," said the milkman to Sunny Boy. "Just because she says a thing is so, doesn't make it. I saw this coward throw the ball and I hope my word is as good as hers. I've got to get on with my milk deliveries now, but before I go home I'll drop in at the school and tell what I saw. Who's the big chief?"

"Mr. Lambert," said Sunny Boy forlornly.

"Don't get rattled—there's nothing to be scared about," the milkman told him. "The old lady isn't hurt, anyway. See, they're putting her in somebody's automobile. I'll be around to school and it will come out all right. I'll make this kid tell the truth if I have to put him into a milk can head first."

He gave the scowling Jack Spratt a lusty

shake and let him go. Then he swung up on the step of his milk wagon and, with a friendly wave of his hand to Sunny Boy, he drove off up the street.

Jack Spratt hastily disappeared. Sunny Boy pressed forward to a position beside Nelson, who was watching two men help Mrs. Speck into an automobile.

"Where were you?" said Nelson. "That's Mr. Royal's automobile—his son is driving it. They're going to take Mrs. Speck home—her ankle is broken or something. She told Mr. Royal's son that it was her fault for getting mixed up in a snowball fight. She said she tried to dodge the ball and it hit her and made her slip. She doesn't want any one to make a fuss about it. She's nice, isn't she?"

Nelson Baker's mother bought her iron holders from Mrs. Speck, too; so Nelson knew her as well as Sunny Boy did.

The door of the coupé slammed. Mr. Royal was the grocer where Billy, the grocery boy,

worked, and Mr. Royal's son went around in this car taking orders from his father's customers.

"Well, I suppose we might as well go to school," said Nelson sadly. "It must be kind of late."

Sunny Boy didn't say anything. He would rather have gone home than go to school, but when there was anything unpleasant that had to be done, Sunny Boy Horton went ahead and did it. He really wanted to tell Nelson about the cross woman who said he threw the ball and about the young milkman who said he didn't and about the awful fib Jack Spratt had told. But Sunny Boy didn't know how to begin.

Perhaps that was the reason not one boy mentioned the snowball fight to Mr. Lambert. No one knew exactly how to go into the office and explain that there had been a snow battle and that in the excitement some one had thrown a ball and it had struck Mrs. Speck. Mr. Lambert was always much surprised when things like

this happened, because none of his pupils ever came and told him beforehand.

“You force me to pry the facts out of you,” he once scolded the school, “when, if you would come out openly and say what you have done, I would be willing to listen and much more inclined to be lenient. It puts you in a much worse light to let me hear of your shortcomings from outsiders instead of from yourselves.”

However, all his talk did no good. Mr. Lambert never heard a word of any fight, inside the school yard or out, until some one, either a teacher or a passer-by, informed him. Neither, when any boy or girl forgot his or her absence excuse or was impolite to a teacher, did Mr. Lambert ever hear of it from the culprit—no, the teacher had to tell him.

This time, of course, Sunny Boy knew he would hear of the snowball fight. The cross woman with the spectacles would tell him. So would Mr. Royal's son, most likely. Sunny Boy wondered if Handy Lee and Jack Spratt were

as worried as he was. Sunny Boy was worried—he couldn't keep his mind on his reading lesson at all and when the classroom door opened suddenly while Oliver Dunlap was reading aloud, Sunny Boy jumped.

CHAPTER V

DIFFERENT STORIES

SUNNY BOY half expected to see Mr. Lambert glaring at him, but it was not the principal who stood there.

“If you please, Miss Curry,” said Kenneth Mason, one of the seventh grade boys, “Mr. Lambert says if there are any boys in your class who saw the snowball fight this morning, he wants them to come down to the auditorium at once.”

Miss Curry frowned. She did not like to have her class work interrupted.

“Was there a snowball fight this morning? After what Mr. Lambert said yesterday?” she said, staring very hard at her pupils. “Well, if any of you children saw this fight, kindly raise your hands.”

Sunny Boy raised his hand, as did Perry and Jimmie and Oliver and Jessie Smiley.

“Very well—go down to the auditorium and mind that you do not loiter in the corridors,” said Miss Curry.

“Gee, he must have heard about it,” Oliver Dunlap whispered, as they clattered downstairs.

Sunny Boy was surprised to see the number of boys in the auditorium. There were a few girls, not more than a dozen in all. Jessie Smiley promptly went over and sat with them, while Sunny Boy and his friends slipped into seats in the same row where Nelson Baker—who was a grade above them—and Carleton Adams (a lame boy who was in the first grammar grade now and who had known Sunny Boy for some time) and several of the older boys sat.

Practically the entire seventh and eighth grades—that is, the boys—were there, and Mr. Lambert was not up on the platform, but sat on the edge of the table which was backed against the platform.

While his pupils were a little afraid of him, they also liked the principal very much. He knew every child in his big school by his or her first name and he knew just about what they did inside of school and out and when he had anything to say to them he always spoke as though they were as old as he was and could understand him. That was the way Sunny Boy's daddy spoke to him, too, and he liked it.

"I've had three complaints so far this morning," said Mr. Lambert directly, as soon as he saw that no more boys were coming into the auditorium. "A Mrs. Deaner, Fred Royal, and a young man named Quick, David Quick, have been in to see me about a snowball fight that started on the next block.

"If you didn't understand yesterday why I made it a rule that snowballs are not to be thrown in the street, I'm sure you see the wisdom of that ruling now," the principal went on, while the rows of boys faced him in perfect silence. "In a city street there is no room for that kind of fun.

Mr. Royal tells me that an old lady slipped and sprained her ankle very badly, as a direct result of this snowball fight. She earns her living selling iron holders and it will be weeks before she is able to get about again. She does not wish to make a complaint, but I understand from Mr. Royal that there is no one to take care of her while she is waiting for her ankle to mend."

Sunny Boy was dreadfully sorry for Mrs. Speck and he was very thankful he had not thrown the snowball.

"Now," went on Mr. Lambert more briskly, "I want to know who were the ringleaders in this fight. From what I can gather, the older boys were at the bottom of it. Who were the captains?"

"I was—for the eighth grade, sir," Handy Lee announced, his face pretty red, but his eyes looking straight at Mr. Lambert.

"Yes, you would be," said the principal. "And the seventh grade of course formed the other side. Who led them?"

No one answered. Nelson Baker clapped his hand to his mouth just in time and Sunny Boy stared around him in surprise. Jack Spratt was not in the auditorium.

"Well, it won't be necessary for any one to tell tales," said Mr. Lambert calmly. "Kenneth, go up to the lower seventh room and tell Miss Ash that I want to see Jack Spratt down here at once."

Sunny Boy stared at him fearfully. This was what made boys afraid of the principal, no matter how kind he might be. He knew things without being told.

Mr. Lambert waited until Jack Spratt had marched in and taken a seat, looking very cross and sullen.

"I gave you your chance when I sent word around that I wished to see every one who had seen the fight this morning, Jack," said the principal. "You led the seventh grade—don't deny it, because I have positive proof. What I wish to make sure of now is the identity of the boy

who threw the ball that struck Mrs. Speck.”

“Sunny Boy Horton threw it,” said Jack Spratt quickly.

“I did *not*!” Sunny Boy retorted, stung into speech and forgetting to be afraid.

“Keep your temper, Sunny Boy,” advised the principal. “I am anxious to find out the truth—and I’ll have to ask you some questions. Did you throw the snowball that hit Mrs. Speck?”

“No, sir,” Sunny Boy answered, speaking more quietly.

“Did you throw any snowballs?” asked Mr. Lambert.

Sunny Boy wished he could say he hadn’t. He was supposed not to throw a single snowball on the street and he wished he could say he had obeyed that rule.

“I—I threw some,” he admitted, with a gulp. “A ball hit me on the ear and I fired a couple back. But I was just making one when Mrs. Speck fell down—I hadn’t thrown it at anybody.”

Mr. Lambert got off the table and walked up and down.

"I may as well tell you, Sunny Boy," he said at last, "that Mrs. Deaner declares flatly that she saw you throw the ball. She was upstairs in her house, watching the fight. On the other hand, the young milkman, David Quick, tells me he saw Jack Spratt throw the ball."

"Sunny Boy didn't throw it," declared Handy Lee.

Mr. Lambert looked relieved.

"Are you sure, Handy?" he asked eagerly.

"I wasn't watching him," admitted Handy. "But he's a good kid; he couldn't tell a story to save his life. If he says he didn't throw the ball, he didn't, that's all."

"I suppose you think I'm telling a story?" Jack Spratt growled.

"Well, you know best," said Handy, with a provoking grin.

"That will do," the principal said sharply. "I don't think you'd be untruthful, if you knew it,

Sunny Boy. But sometimes, when we're excited, we do things without knowing it. Mrs. Deaner is so positive she saw you throw the ball that I'm undecided—you might have been so carried away with the thrill of the battle that you hurled a ball without realizing it."

Sunny Boy knew he had not. The soft ball he had been making had dropped from his hand as he heard Mrs. Speck cry out. How Mrs. Deaner could say he had thrown the snowball when he knew he had not, he was unable to understand.

It was her story that troubled Mr. Lambert. After he had asked every one if they had actually seen who had thrown the snowball—and not one of the boys, nor the girls, either, had been watching closely enough to see that, though they had all seen Mrs. Speck on the ground—the principal read them a brief lecture on carelessness and again emphasized the rule that there must be no snowballing in the streets. He said that Handy Lee and Jack Spratt, as the lead-

ers, would have to stay in one hour after school every night for a week. Even Handy Lee's cheerful face clouded at that. It was stiffer punishment than Mr. Lambert usually imposed. Then he dismissed them as the recess gong sounded, but he kept Sunny Boy Horton and Jack Spratt and talked to them ten minutes longer.

David Quick was sure Jack had thrown the ball and Mrs. Deaner was equally certain that Sunny Boy had thrown it. Jack said Sunny Boy had, too, and much as the boys liked Sunny Boy, Handy Lee was the only one who would come out openly and say he had not hurled the snowball.

"Handy isn't a very good witness, either," said Mr. Lambert, smiling, "because he didn't see who did throw the ball. He's acting as a friend of yours. Well, we'll have to let this go over for a little while. Sorry, Sunny Boy."

He put his hand for a moment on Sunny Boy's shoulder, and Sunny Boy suddenly felt

that the principal was almost sure he had not thrown the snowball.

He went upstairs and got his cap and coat and ran out into the playground. The primary grades had the back yard and the front yard was given over to the grammar grades. So there was no sign of Handy Lee or Carleton Adams or Jack Spratt. But Sunny Boy did find Nelson Baker talking so fast he fairly stuttered.

"Of course Sunny didn't!" Nelson was saying as Sunny Boy came up to him. "I guess he knows whether he threw that old snowball or not. He didn't throw it, and that's all there is to it."

"Sure he didn't," agreed Jimmie Butterworth. "Here he is now—don't you care what any one says, Sunny Boy, you didn't throw that snowball. The first chance I get I'm going to tell that Jack Spratt what I think of him."

"Oh-h, don't you fight him, Jimmie Butterworth!" Jessie Smiley cried in alarm. "If Mr. Lambert catches you fighting on the school

grounds he has you suspended for a week."

"I'll fight him off the school grounds then," said Jimmie valiantly.

But Jack Spratt was six or seven years older than Jimmie and a great deal heavier. It was not likely that they would ever fight each other.

"Nobody believes a word Jack Spratt says, Sunny Boy," Oliver Dunlap tried to comfort Sunny Boy. "He's the biggest coward there is in school. Handy Lee says if he says he didn't throw the ball, that's one good sign he did."

Sunny Boy found them a great comfort—these loyal friends of his. The boys who had gone to Miss Ford's school with him and the girls, too—Jessie Smiley and Helen Graham were in public school this year, too—were as sure as could be that he had not thrown the snowball. Many of the other boys in his classroom came and told him that they knew he would not tell a story about it. If he said he didn't he didn't, and that was all there was to it.

Handy Lee and Carleton Adams, among the

older boys, "stood up" for Sunny Boy, too. As they said plainly, they knew Jack Spratt very well and he had not a good reputation for owning up when he was accused of doing anything wrong.

But Jack had his friends also, some of them among the younger boys in Sunny Boy's classroom. Nothing else was talked of during recess, and when Sunny Boy went back to Miss Curry's room, his mind was so full of the dispute that he failed miserably in his arithmetic—at the blackboard, too. It was much more disgraceful to fail at the blackboard where Miss Curry and every pupil in the room could see the mistakes one made.

"If you'd spend a little more time on your arithmetic lesson and less on playing in the snow, I think you'd have a better report card, Sunny Boy," said Miss Curry crossly.

She wasn't usually like that, but Mr. Lambert had been talking to her about the snowball fight and he had told her that Sunny Boy could not

have a high mark in deportment that month. Miss Curry was anxious for her class to win the banner for deportment that month and it made her cross to think that one of her boys had brought the average down.

When Sunny Boy went home to lunch that noon, he paid no attention to his rubber boots and the beautiful big drifts. He didn't even pat Toby when he came to meet him. And at the lunch table he surprised his mother by beginning to cry when she asked him if he had had a nice morning in school.

CHAPTER VI

OLD MRS. SPECK

MRS. HORTON was so surprised to see Sunny Boy crying that she very nearly cried herself.

“Why, Precious!” she kept saying. “Why, Sunny Boy, dear! What is the matter?”

Sunny Boy hardly ever cried. Once, when Toby was lost, he did, and when he was so unhappy with the circus folk he may have wept a little when no one was looking. But here he was sitting at his own luncheon table crying as though his heart would break, and his mother and poor, puzzled Harriet trying to find out what had happened to him.

By and by the story came out—all about the snowball fight and about Jack Spratt and

Handy Lee and the milkman and the cross Mrs. Deaner and poor old Mrs. Speck.

“And I didn’t throw the snowball and I can’t have an A in deportment on my card and maybe poor Mrs. Speck will die!” sobbed Sunny Boy.

But he began to feel better, even as he cried. For there is no better way to get rid of a trouble than to tell it to your mother. Mrs. Horton dipped her clean handkerchief in cold water and wiped Sunny Boy’s eyes, and Harriet brought him the biggest piece of gingercake he had ever had and Toby put his dear smooth head across his little master’s knees and Sunny Boy gulped once or twice and found he could almost manage a smile.

“Why, of course you didn’t throw that snowball, Sunny Boy,” said his mother, when she had heard everything. “I know you didn’t and so does Harriet; and Daddy will be just as sure when we tell him. As long as you know you didn’t throw it, you can afford to be patient. In some way the truth will come out. It always

does, dear. Just be as good as you can be and don't get angry—remember Mr. Lambert and the boys haven't known you as long as we have. And, Sunny Boy Horton, I have the very nicest plan!"

This time Sunny Boy really could smile. He looked at his pretty mother and saw that her cheeks were pink and her eyes were sparkling.

"You and I will go and see Mrs. Speck just as soon as school is out this afternoon," said Mrs. Horton. "I don't know where she lives, but I'll telephone Mr. Royal and Harriet will fix us a basket of good things to eat and we'll go to see her. A sprained ankle is painful and slow to heal, but people do not die from that kind of hurt. Be sure you hurry home from school and we'll go right away."

Sunny Boy thought this was a splendid plan. He felt so much better that he went out in the back yard and had three slides before Nelson called him.

"Did you tell your mother about the snowball

fight?" asked Nelson, as the two boys walked back to school. "What did she say?"

Sunny Boy told him and Nelson nodded.

"My mother said she knew you would own up if you did throw the snowball," he said. "But she said just what your mother did—that people who didn't know you as well as we did might think you were just like Jack Spratt."

Sunny Boy did much better in school that afternoon. He listened so well while Miss Curry read the class a story that when she closed the book and called on different boys and girls to tell what she had read to them, Sunny Boy could tell more than any of the others. And his writing lesson was among the six neatest and that meant it would be pinned upon the black-board for a week.

When school was dismissed, Sunny Boy was surprised to meet Handy Lee in the lower hall.

"Hello, Sunny Boy—I can't stay a minute," said Handy hurriedly. "I have to stay in an hour, you know. I just wanted to tell you not

to fuss about that old snowball. Mr. Lambert doesn't think you fired it. He can't say much, because Mrs. Deaner is the aunt of somebody on the Board of Education and he has to act as though he believes what she says. You don't have to worry. And say, when my cousin takes me on his ice boat I'm going to ask him to take you, too—want to go along?"

"Oh, yes!" breathed the delighted Sunny Boy, who had never been on an ice boat. "I'd like to go, Handy."

"All right—I won't forget," Handy promised, and away he sped up the stairs and over to the grammar school section of the building where he and Jack Spratt sat in the detention room and scowled at each other till four o'clock.

Sunny Boy, Nelson, and Oliver Dunlap walked home together. Nelson and Oliver were interested to hear that Sunny Boy was going to see Mrs. Speck and they asked him to be sure and tell them how she was.

"We're going coasting over on Abbot Hill,"

said Nelson, as Sunny Boy reached his step and Toby, inside, stood up and looked out of the window at him. "If you get back in time, come on over. We have to come home by half past four because it begins to get dark and Mother won't let me coast when it's dark—she's afraid something will run into me."

Sunny Boy went into the house and there was his mother with her hat on, all ready to go with him to see Mrs. Speck. Harriet had packed a basket and she told Sunny Boy there was tea and bread and butter and jelly and a loaf of molasses cake and a dozen fresh eggs in the basket.

"After we see her, we'll know better what she needs," said Mrs. Horton, slipping on her heavy coat.

Toby wanted to go with them, but Mrs. Horton said he ought to stay and take care of Harriet. Sunny Boy carried the basket and he and his mother went briskly down the snow-covered street.

"I think we're going to have more snow," said Mrs. Horton, glancing up at the sky. "Sunny Boy, Mrs. Speck doesn't live far away, after all; Mr. Royal told me it is on Summer Street and that is only half a dozen blocks from here."

Sunny Boy thought it was funny to be going to Summer Street in the winter, but when they reached the street it did not look as though it was ever a very gay place, even in the middle of summer. It was a short street and the houses on it were all huddled together. Mrs. Speck lived in No. 16, Mrs. Horton said, and Sunny Boy was the first to spy it.

It was a wooden house, sandwiched in between two narrow brick houses, and when they went in the hall there were no bells to ring nor, apparently, any one to ask.

"What do you want?" said a woman, opening a door so suddenly at the back of the hall that Sunny Boy jumped.

Mrs. Horton explained that they were looking for Mrs. Speck.

“Third floor—left-hand door,” the woman said, and disappeared again.

The third floor was the top floor and it was only half as large as the first two floors—that is, the windows were only half as long, as Sunny Boy saw when they entered Mrs. Speck’s room. They had knocked and she had called “come in” and they found her lying on a bed in one corner of the room.

Mrs. Speck was glad to see them, and though she insisted she was very comfortable, she seemed delighted when Mrs. Horton set a tray for her and arranged it on a chair near the bed for her supper. There was a fire in a tiny stove and Mrs. Speck said her landlady came up once a day and took care of it for her.

She and Mrs. Horton talked together for a while and Sunny Boy peeped out of the tiny windows down into the street. There were children playing in the snow and he hoped he would get home in time to go coasting on Abbot Hill with Nelson.

Finally Mrs. Horton rose to go and called Sunny Boy to say good-by to the old lady.

"I know you didn't hit me with any snow-ball," said Mrs. Speck, peering at him with her small bright eyes. "Your ma's been telling me about the dispute in school. Soon as I get so I can walk, I'll go see that principal and tell him it wasn't anybody's fault."

Sunny Boy said good-by a little shyly and he and his mother went carefully down the steep, dark stairs—you had to go very carefully, for it would be easy to trip and fall.

"Sunny Boy, I think I know how you and the other boys can help Mrs. Speck," said Mrs. Horton, when she and Sunny Boy were safely out on the street again. "I want to talk it over with Daddy first, and then I'll tell you."

"Yes'm," Sunny Boy answered. "And Mother, do you mind if I go coasting with Nelson Baker and Oliver Dunlap? They're over on Abbot Hill."

"Did Daddy say that was a safe hill?" asked

Mrs. Horton. "And isn't it pretty late to start coasting, Sunny Boy? It gets dark so early now."

"Daddy said Abbot Hill was all right, Mother," Sunny Boy urged, "and Nelson has to come home at half-past four. His mother said so. I'll come, too."

So Mrs. Horton said he might go and Sunny Boy took her home and kissed her and left her telling Harriet about their visit to old Mrs. Speck.

Toby couldn't go coasting, either—a tangle of sleds was not the place for a dog, as Sunny Boy explained to him—and when he reached the hill there was not a dog in sight. Not all the hills in Centronia were "good" for coasting, but Abbot Hill was approved by the city police and by the boys and girls alike. It was steep and smooth and there was only one cross street, and that at the very end.

Sunny Boy knew how to find Nelson and Oliver. He went to the top of the hill and

watched every boy who came up, pulling a sled after him. In a few minutes he saw the gray sweater of Nelson and the blue and red sweater Oliver always wore.

"Hi, Nelson!" shouted Sunny Boy.

"Did you bring your sled?" Nelson greeted him.

"I didn't wait—it's down cellar," explained Sunny Boy. "It was five minutes after four when we got home. We'll have to hurry because we have to go home pretty soon."

Nelson had a sled, and so did Oliver, but just as Nelson seated himself for another coast (Oliver offered to take Sunny Boy on his sled) Jessie Smiley came up and reminded Nelson that he had promised to lend her his sled.

"I didn't say this time," argued Nelson.

"Why, Nelson Baker, you said 'next time' and this is the next time," Jessie said. "You promised, Nelson—you know you did."

"I think girls are more trouble than anything else in the world," Nelson announced bitterly.

"I wouldn't bring Ruth because she always says her feet are cold; and now I have to lend you my sled and you don't know the first thing about steering."

"Yes, I do, too," said Jessie. "I know all about it. Only you let me go first so I won't run into you."

Nelson groaned and Jessie took the sled.

"Let Sunny Boy steer," suggested Oliver.

"I'm going by myself," Jessie declared. "I can steer as well as he can."

"Then you steer my sled, Sunny Boy," said Oliver. "Nelson and I will get on behind. Say, this will be fun!"

Oliver's sled wasn't very large and when Sunny Boy and Nelson and Oliver all piled on it, it was difficult to tell where one boy ended and another began. Jessie looked at them over her shoulder, laughed, and gave her sled a push with her foot.

"Try to beat me!" she challenged as she started down the hill.



They shot across the sidewalk

"All right!" grunted Sunny Boy, and Nelson lunged out with his foot, and that started the sled.

The hill was well filled with coasters by this time and Jessie was sorry she had insisted on going alone, almost as soon as she started. By the time she was half way down, she wanted nothing in the world so much as to stop. Without thinking of the flying sleds coming after hers, she tried to swing over toward the curb.

"*Keep going!*" Nelson shouted at her. "Jessie, keep going *down* the hill!"

But Jessie shut her eyes tight and tried to steer her sled for the curb at the same time. Sunny Boy, his face stung by the flying snow, looked ahead and saw a sled and a girl directly in his path.

"You can't go round!" screamed Nelson in dismay, as he saw Sunny Boy begin to swing the sled toward the curb, too.

Sunny Boy "sawed" with his brown-gloved little hands furiously. Nelson kept shouting di-

rections every minute, but he paid no heed. There was a sickening lurch as the sled hit something, tilted, and then righted itself. They shot across the sidewalk, directly in front of an astonished somebody, and then, making an amazing curve, they sailed through an open iron gate and came to a stop a few feet away from a frozen fountain.

CHAPTER VII

ANOTHER BATTLE

GEE!" said Nelson Baker.

"Go-osh!" Oliver Dunlap quavered.

Sunny Boy said nothing at all. He was breathing as though he had been running and, as the two other boys tumbled off the sled, Sunny Boy rolled into the snow and then got up, rubbing his knee.

"I thought we were going to hit that iron fence," said Nelson.

"Did you see that man staring at us?" Oliver asked.

"It's lucky the gate was open," said Sunny Boy, finding his voice at last.

He had managed to steer the sled around Jessie Smiley, across the curb at the gutter—the snow made the road as high as the curb at that

place—and then he had seen the great iron fence toward which they were speeding. The iron gate was open and Sunny Boy, scarcely realizing how he did it, had guided the sled through the narrow opening into the broad expanse of snow-covered garden.

“Well, we might as well go back,” he said matter-of-factly now.

They went back to the road and found that Jessie Smiley had had enough of coasting for the day and after two more coasts apiece, Nelson and Sunny Boy had to go home, for it was half past four. Oliver went, too. He said it was “no fun” without the others.

That night there was a great deal to tell Mr. Horton at the dinner table. Sunny Boy told him what had happened in school, and his daddy said he was sure Sunny Boy had not thrown the snowball that hurt Mrs. Speck. Then Mrs. Horton told about her visit to Mrs. Speck and that the doctor said it would be seven or eight weeks before she could hope to walk again.

“She has a great many orders for iron holders that people have given her for Christmas and she can keep busy and happy sewing, if she has some one to deliver the holders when they are made,” said Mrs. Horton. “I thought Sunny Boy and perhaps some of the children in his class might take turns going every day to see her. They could do any errands she needed done, and take her the packages of pieces people always send her and deliver her holders when she gets them made. In that way she won’t lose any money, and if I go in to see her every now and then or Mrs. Baker goes, we’ll be sure she is well taken care of.”

Mr. Horton said he thought this was a fine plan and Sunny Boy liked it, too. He went to see Mrs. Speck the very next day after school, and took her a bundle of pieces from his mother. Old Mrs. Speck made her iron holders from bits of cloth given to her, so they really did not cost her anything.

Nelson Baker went the next day after Sunny

Boy and then Oliver Dunlap went. Handy Lee heard about the plan and he and his mother went to see Mrs. Speck, too. Before a week had gone by, there were six boys "taking care of Mrs. Speck" on a regular schedule, and she told Mr. Lambert, who called to see her and tell her how sorry he was that she had been hurt through the carelessness of his pupils, that she was having a fine rest.

But before this was all arranged, Sunny Boy experienced another snowball fight. Mrs. Horton had been right about the weather, and that very night it snowed so much that all the clean walks were covered up again and the wagon and automobile tracks in the road did not show at all. Sunny Boy tied Toby's overshoes on him again and when he went to the baker's with him he forgot to take them off and Mrs. Baker, who was looking out of her front window, laughed till the tears came to her eyes.

Sunny Boy wore his own rubber boots to school, of course, and he and Nelson had per-

suaded their mothers to let them take their lunch. Sunny Boy had long thought it would be "exciting" to stay at school for lunch, as some of the older boys did, and Mrs. Horton had promised that some stormy day he might try it. So this morning Harriet packed for him a neat little lunch in a box, and Nelson's mother packed a lunch in a box, too, and both boys set off feeling as though they might be Arctic explorers.

"If you only didn't have to go home for lunch at noon," said Oliver Dunlap, meeting them at the gate of the school yard, "you could have a pack of fun with us."

"We're not going home," said Sunny Boy eagerly. "We brought our lunch—didn't we, Nelson?"

"That's great!" Oliver declared. "Some of us boys are going to have a snowball fight this noon."

"Mr. Lambert won't like it," said Sunny Boy uneasily.

"Yes, he will—that is, he won't mind," Oliver

replied. "We're going over in the vacant lot opposite the garage. Mr. Lambert won't care as long as we don't throw snowballs on the street."

Sunny Boy had had one sad experience with snowballs, but he could easily see that a snowball fight on a vacant lot—where they could not interfere with people walking past—would be "different." Oliver, who had been the first boy in the school yard that morning, seemed to know all the plans and he told Sunny Boy and Nelson that Handy Lee and Jack Spratt were going to be the captains this time, too."

"Handy told me to ask you and Nelson and any one else I knew," said Oliver. "We want to be on his side."

There was so much talk about the snowball fight that even when the bell rang some of the boys kept whispering and rustling. But when Miss Curry said that she would keep any one in at noon if she heard him whisper, the room became as still as still could be. No one knew how

Miss Curry had heard of the snowball fight, but she must have heard of it, for she *never* kept her pupils in at noon—she made them stay after quarter of three in the afternoon.

“When you come back to the afternoon session, I shall have something important to tell you,” said Miss Curry, as her class was waiting for the dismissal gong at noon.

“Clang!” the great bell sounded through the corridors and the children seemed to fairly pour out of the various classrooms.

The girls had wanted to join in the snowball fight, but Handy Lee said they had already been scolded for one fight and if a snowball should hit a girl in the eye, there would probably be another scolding ready for the boys. So girls were barred, and perhaps fifty boys swallowed their lunches in ten minutes and then swarmed across the street to the vacant lot.

The lot was not directly opposite the school, but on the same block, and so near that the Board of Education sometimes discussed buying

it for a playground. It was very wide and as deep as the school yard and there was one building on it—a ramshackle cabin with two windows boarded up, for the glass in them had been broken long ago.

“Hello, Sunny Boy,” said Handy Lee, grinning. “You’re on my side. So are you, Nelson Baker. You kids start to work making snowballs. Pile ’em up beside the house. This is my headquarters. We wanted the signboard, but Jack Spratt spoke for it first.”

The signboard was a large advertising sign, nailed up on posts and coming to within a few feet of the ground. It made a wonderful breastworks for the enemy, and Sunny Boy wondered how Jack Spratt had come to get it instead of Handy. Every one in school knew that Handy was a better “general” than Jack.

“Jack wouldn’t draw lots,” whispered Oliver Dunlap, busy helping Sunny Boy pile up snowballs. “Handy wanted to pull papers out of a hat and see which one should have it; but Jack

said he wouldn't fight unless he could have the signboard first off, and Handy let him have it."

As soon as there were enough snowballs ready, the fight started. The younger boys were supposed to work steadily at making ammunition, but it was asking too much of them to expect them never to fire a shot. Sunny Boy hurled six in rapid succession and was so eager to hit an enemy that he found himself half way across the lot and walking right up to the signboard, behind which the enemy were crouching, when he heard Handy Lee's voice.

"Come back, Sunny Boy!" Handy shouted. "Sunny Boy Horton! Come back here!"

A boy darted out from behind the signboard and Sunny Boy wheeled and ran. He fairly tore over the ground, but the other lad was gaining on him when his rubber boot caught in a root, or something under the snow, and he sprawled flat. Sunny Boy dashed on and crashed up against Oliver, breathless but safe.

"Where were you going—to China?" scolded

Handy. "You stay around here where your friends are."

Sunny Boy made another pile of ammunition and then he began to thirst again for a part in the battle.

"If I could get up on that roof, I could throw balls clear across the lot," he thought. "I'll bet I could get up there."

Nelson and Oliver had followed Handy and a few of the older boys out into the center of the lot where they dared the other side out from behind the signboard. There was no one to help Sunny Boy climb up on the roof, but the shack was only one story high, and he panted and pushed and tugged and scrambled, until at last he found himself on top of the small building.

"I forgot to bring any snowballs," he said, wondering how much snow there was inside his boots. It felt like a great deal.

He had knocked off the snow along the ledges, but the center of the roof was heaped ankle deep in white. Sunny Boy walked toward the middle

of the roof, meaning to gather up enough material for a mammoth ball. Suddenly he stepped into a hole and felt himself going down into a well. He shouted, but his voice was drowned by the noise the other boys were making.

“Oh, Handy! Nelson!” screamed Sunny Boy, as he struck feet first on something hard and an avalanche of snow tumbled lightly on his head and went down the back of his neck. “Hey, Nelson! Oliver!”

Then, loud and clear, Sunny Boy heard the sound of a bell—the warning bell that meant only five more minutes were left before one o’clock.

CHAPTER VIII

SUNNY BOY RECITES

SUNNY BOY wriggled and twisted, but he could not get out. He seemed to be in a tunnel, he thought, or a well—only, he reminded himself, people did not build wells inside of houses.

“Nelson!” he shouted again. “Hey, Nelson!”

Though the noise outside had stopped, no one answered him. Sunny Boy could picture the snowball army galloping toward the school. No matter which side was winning, no one would dare disregard that warning bell.

Poor Sunny Boy looked up. There was the hole through which he had fallen. He could see a patch of wintery sky above him, too. And, my goodness, there was a brick teetering on the edge of the hole.

"I—I wouldn't like that to come down on my head," thought Sunny Boy desperately.

He tried to duck—in case the brick should tumble on him, but he was in such a narrow space that he couldn't duck. He tried to kick—and then he *was* surprised!

His foot, instead of striking against a wall, struck nothing! Carefully Sunny Boy kicked again—no, there was nothing there.

"Why!" said Sunny Boy, staring straight up at the sky. "Why, I know what happened to me—I fell down the chimney! Just like Santa Claus!"

The idea rather pleased him. It explained the brick, too. And of course the open space where he could kick his feet freely must be the fireplace.

"If I could scrunch down—the way Santa Claus does—maybe I could crawl out of the fireplace," thought Sunny Boy.

He "scrunched," but he wondered how on earth Santa Claus managed with his pack. Be-

cause it was all Sunny Boy Horton could do, without a sack of toys and without being at all fat as Santa was, to squeeze himself down into a little round ball and, with much grunting and turning and twisting, to tumble out into the one room the shack contained.

"Well, I did it!" said Sunny Boy aloud.

The room was shadowy, for the windows were boarded up, but the boards had been carelessly nailed on and there were wide cracks that let in some light. Sunny Boy was very anxious to get to school—Miss Curry wanted the attendance banner, too, as well as the deportment banner, and if she should mark him absent she would scold him the minute she saw him. He hammered with all his might against the window boards.

Creak! one began to give way.

Sunny Boy saw an iron stove shaker in one corner of the room and he picked it up quickly. It made a splendid hammer and after half a dozen blows he had ripped out two boards which

gave him enough space to wriggle through. His coat caught on a nail, but he couldn't worry about that—his whole mind was set on getting to school before the roll was marked for the afternoon.

"Hi there—where you going?" shouted a man standing in the doorway of the garage.

"Have you been fooling around inside that shack?" a man standing on a wagonload of old iron shouted, too.

Sunny Boy waved his hand and continued to run. His boots bothered him, but he plunged on. He had reached the street and was crossing the road to get to the school when he saw a woman stop on the curb and stare at him.

"If you aren't a sight!" she greeted him. "What have you been up to this time?"

It was Mrs. Deaner.

Sunny Boy kept on running. He had no breath to give to talking and he certainly couldn't stop and explain to Mrs. Deaner where he had been. He dashed for the stairs, saw the monitor

who was on duty in the hall to mark down stragglers, and tried to duck around him.

"No, you don't!" said Jack Spratt.

Sunny Boy had his foot on the first step and he kept on going. Jack jumped for him, caught him by the elbow and they both clattered down the one step, and rolled up against the door of the office.

The door opened promptly.

"What are you doing?" said Mr. Lambert coldly.

"He's late and he's trying to get by me," Jack Spratt explained.

"I'm not late," said Sunny Boy, winking furiously. "I want to get upstairs before Miss Curry marks the roll. I heard the warning bell, but I couldn't come, because I was down a chimney."

To his surprise, the principal began to laugh.

"I never would have known you, Sunny Boy," he said. "You're covered with soot. Suppose you go in and wash up and I'll write a note to

your teacher for you. Stop in after you've washed your face and give me the details. No tardy mark this time, Jack."

Jack went off to his classroom looking far from pleased. Sunny Boy scrubbed his face and hands in the washroom and Miss Brander, the principal's secretary, mopped him up "around the edges" as she said when, a little drippy but much improved, he came back.

Mr. Lambert seemed to be interested in hearing about his tumble down the chimney and he wrote a brief note to Miss Curry explaining that Sunny Boy was neither absent nor late. "Just detained," Mr. Lambert wrote. Miss Curry was surprised to see Sunny Boy, but she said she was very glad to take the black mark opposite his name away and give him a "present" mark.

"You're just in time to hear about our plans for Thanksgiving, Sunny Boy," said Miss Curry, when she had heard what had happened to him. "I am giving out the pieces to be spoken and I have half a dozen verses for you to learn."

Sunny Boy knew that half a dozen was six. That meant that he had six verses to learn.

"Are they in a row, Miss Curry?" he asked doubtfully.

"In a row?" she repeated. "I don't understand you, Sunny Boy."

"I mean, do they belong to each other or are they separate verses?" said Sunny Boy.

"Why, certainly, they are all one poem," Miss Curry declared. "And I want to warn this class that no matter how many snowball fights you may have, nor how good the coasting is, I shall not accept that as an excuse for not learning your verses. You are to study at home and the day before the exercises, you will recite to me."

"I have a great deal to do," said Sunny Boy at home that night. "I have to go to school every day and see old Mrs. Speck and learn half a dozen verses and play in the snow."

"I think Mother has a great deal to do, too," Mr. Horton commented. "It looks to me as

though you must have left most of your overcoat in that old shack, Sunny Boy."

"Oh, not as bad as that, Daddy," said Mrs. Horton cheerfully—she was mending Sunny Boy's coat where he had torn it. "Don't you want to start Sunny Boy off on his Thanksgiving piece? He really ought to begin to study it right away."

Sunny Boy had his verses in his pocket and he took them out and smoothed the paper carefully and handed it to his daddy.

"Miss Curry said the name of it is, 'A Thankful Boy,'" Sunny Boy explained. "I saw Nelson after school—he is going to be in a duet."

"Does Nelson sing?" asked Mr. Horton, apparently surprised.

"Oh, he doesn't *sing*, Daddy," Sunny Boy hastened to set him right. "He talks—Nelson and another boy talk—they take turns."

"Then it is a dialogue," explained Mr. Horton. "Don't you have to be in a dialogue, Sunny Boy?"

Sunny Boy shook his head. He was positive that he did not "take turns" with any one.

Mr. Horton took the paper up and read the verses through.

"You might learn two at a time, Sunny Boy," he suggested. "Then before you know it, you will have learned six verses."

Sunny Boy was perfectly willing, but dear me, learning even two verses proved to be pretty hard work. Sunny Boy didn't see how he was ever to learn six, if he couldn't learn two, but his daddy told him not to worry about the arithmetic of it.

"Learning to speak a piece is always surprising," declared Mr. Horton. "You think you do not know a word, and then some morning you wake up and find you've learned the whole thing."

That night Mr. Horton read the two verses to Sunny Boy and for the next three days Sunny Boy tried to repeat as much of them as he could remember, wherever he went. When he took

Toby for a walk and when he went to see Mrs. Speck—who said she didn't know what she would do if it hadn't been for Sunny Boy to go to the grocer's and baker's for her—every spare moment he had, Sunny Boy tried to recite his verses. He could not get all the lines straight, but he did learn the first verse "by heart." It went like this:

"A boy should always thankful be,
And I am thankful, for you see
My grandpa raises turkeys fat,
My aunt makes pie and mince at that."

The next verse went on to tell how the boy's mother baked cookies and his grandma put sage in the turkey stuffing and all the other verses said something about good things to eat. Harriet said it made her hungry just to hear Sunny Boy reciting a poem like that.

Well, Mr. Horton must have learned pieces to speak in school, because Sunny Boy found

it turned out just as he had said. One studied and studied and couldn't remember the right words for the right lines and then, some morning, one woke up and there was the piece right on the tip of the tongue. Sunny Boy woke up the whole house one morning, reciting at the top of his lungs (so Harriet said) that—

“Some one whose name I do not know
Plants raisins and then makes them grow.
I'm thankful to that unknown man,
Who must for nuts and raisins plan.”

After that, of course, there was nothing for the rest of the family to do but get up and eat breakfast half an hour earlier than usual.

Usually Mrs. Horton or Harriet listened to Sunny Boy recite, but they were sometimes busy. So then he made Toby listen, for he simply had to have an audience.

“Mother, why couldn't Toby come to the exercises in school and hear me speak my piece?”

asked Sunny Boy, a few days before Thanksgiving.

“Oh, that would never do,” Mrs. Horton answered, smiling. “Toby would distract the speakers—you children would be playing with him, instead of paying attention to your songs and recitations. I think we’ll leave Toby home the afternoon before Thanksgiving.”

Sunny Boy’s mother and his Aunt Bessie were coming to hear Sunny Boy recite, but his daddy couldn’t come because he was busy at the office; and Harriet couldn’t come because she was busy getting the Thanksgiving dinner ready. However, the auditorium of the school was filled with an interested audience the afternoon before Thanksgiving. Sunny Boy, peeping through the curtain drawn across the platform, told Nelson Baker that he thought there must be at least “a million people.”

“There aren’t seats enough for a million people,” said Nelson.

So there couldn’t have been a million, after

all. But there were as many as there were seats, and a row of people for whom there were no seats stood against the wall under the gallery.

The exercises opened with singing by the entire school, primary and grammar grades. Then Handy Lee—who, in spite of looking as though he was always just about to laugh, had a good deal of common sense and was not easily “fussed”—made a little speech of welcome.

Three little girls sang, one of whom was so frightened she forgot her words and Sunny Boy heard her singing, “Da-da-da” through the whole song.

After that Nelson Baker and Marshall Wayne gave their dialogue. This was funny, because Nelson was supposed to be a mince pie and Marshall was a pumpkin pie, and Sunny Boy was so interested in listening to them that when Mr. Lambert said, “The next recitation is entitled ‘A Thankful Boy,’ by Arthur Bradford Horton,” Oliver Dunlap had to nudge him twice before he remembered that that was the name of his piece.

“Go on out—that’s you,” whispered Oliver.
“Hurry up!”

Sunny Boy walked out on the platform and made a little bow. He saw row after row of people smiling at him. He knew where his mother and Aunt Bessie were sitting—in the third row on the left aisle—but he was so surprised to see his daddy sitting there beside his mother that he almost said, why, Daddy, I thought you weren’t coming!

He didn’t, though. Instead, Sunny Boy began to recite his piece and he didn’t have a bit of trouble with the verses. They seemed to be in the back of his head, just as he wanted them. He had finished four verses and was beginning on the fifth when the people standing up in the back of the auditorium began to whisper and laugh.

“Catch him!” Sunny Boy heard some one say.
“Sh! Catch him.”

“Oh, look!” came from somebody else.

Then came a giggle from behind him.

Sunny Boy went on reciting—the fifth verse was about the nuts and raisins.

Just as he reached the second line, a big dog came leaping down the center aisle. He made the platform in one jump and with a deep bark, lunged for Sunny Boy.

It was Toby!

CHAPTER IX

GOOD SLEDDING

PLANTS raisins,'” said Sunny Boy mechanically. “‘Plants raisins’——”

“Catch him!” some one in the audience kept shouting. “Hey, catch him!”

Toby put his paws on Sunny Boy’s shoulders and began to lick his master’s face with his rough red tongue.

“I heard you reciting!” the dog seemed to be trying to say. “I heard you speaking your piece, Sunny Boy! It was fine!”

But in another minute Mr. Lambert and Sunny Boy’s daddy had run up the steps to the platform and they had Toby by the collar.

“I’ll take him home,” said Mr. Horton. “He was locked up, but in some way he’s made his escape. Down, Toby! Bad dog!”

"Don't take him home till you hear the end of my piece, Daddy," begged Sunny Boy.

The audience began to clap.

"Yes, you must hear the end of Sunny Boy's recitation," Mr. Lambert insisted. "We'll hold Toby. Go ahead and finish, Sunny Boy."

Then, not without some difficulty, for Toby seemed to like it on the platform, Sunny Boy's daddy and the principal dragged the dog down the steep little steps and kept their hands on his collar while Sunny Boy made another bow and went back to the beginning of the fifth verse.

"These are the last two verses," he told the audience.

You know about the nuts and raisins, for we've already told you, but the last verse of all went like this:

"I am a very thankful boy,
And I would like to share my joy.
I hope that every one of you
Will celebrate Thanksgiving, too."

Toby listened with his ears cocked up while Sunny Boy recited. And when, as he finished, the audience applauded heartily, the dog thumped his tail on the floor and his brown eyes beamed. He was proud of Sunny Boy—why, any one could see that!

Then Mr. Horton took him home and Sunny Boy went down and sat with his mother and Aunt Bessie and listened to the remainder of the program. Harriet told them, when they came home, that she could scarcely believe her eyes when she saw Mr. Horton bringing Toby in.

“He must have slipped out when I went into the yard to get my dish towels,” explained Harriet. “I didn’t latch the door and Toby must have pushed it open and jumped the fence while my back was turned. And then to think of him marching all the way to school! You never can tell what that dog will be up to next.”

Sunny Boy had a beautiful Thanksgiving. Aunt Bessie came to dinner and afterward he and Daddy went to see Mrs. Speck and carried

her a basket with turkey and cranberry sauce and all sorts of good things in it. Sunny Boy recited his Thanksgiving piece for her, too—as he said, he'd better tell it to her right away because he would forget it before another Thanksgiving Day came. He had to learn a new piece every year because he always forgot the old one.

The day after Thanksgiving there was no school, and Nelson and Oliver Dunlap and Jimmie Butterworth came over to play with Sunny Boy. Ruth Baker wanted to play, too, and though Nelson said girls were in the way, his mother thought that just once he might let his little sister do as he did.

"We're going to harness Toby to my sled," said Sunny Boy. "First we have to make the harness."

Toby was interested in the harness, too. He sat as close to Sunny Boy as he could get and he watched while the pieces of rope were knotted together and then, when Sunny Boy went down cellar to get his sled, Toby went, too.

"How do you know he can pull a sled?" asked Ruth Baker.

"Didn't he pull a wagon?" Nelson said impatiently.

"Well, a sled is different," persisted Ruth. "If Toby would sit down while he was pulling you on a sled, you'd bump into him."

"He wouldn't care," Sunny Boy assured her. "Toby knows when things are just in fun. He likes to play in the snow."

Sunny Boy was a very lucky boy. He often said so. For instance, he had two sleds, an old one and a new one. Aunt Bessie had given him the new one on his latest birthday, and it was a beauty.

"I think I'll harness Toby to the old sled," said Sunny Boy, "in case he tips it over. He might tip it over while he was learning how to pull a sled, you know."

Toby stood patiently to be harnessed to the sled and he sat down only once. Harriet, who was watching from the kitchen window, sug-

gested that the boys let Toby pull Ruth around the yard first.

"Then when you take him out on the street, he'll be a little used to the idea," Harriet explained.

So Ruth sat down on the sled, Sunny Boy said, "Gid-ap," and Toby began to pull.

"He's going!" shrieked Ruth in delight. "Sunny Boy, he's going!"

"Yes, of course he is," said Sunny Boy proudly. "Toby can do anything we want him to."

Toby pulled Ruth three times around the yard before her mother called to her to come in and try on her new blue serge skirt.

"I have to have it for school Monday," said Ruth importantly, "but I will come out again, maybe."

She trotted into the house and Toby sat down to rest--Ruth was rather heavy, even if she was only a little girl.

"Now we can go out in front," Sunny Boy

announced. "No, don't get on now, Oliver—wait till we get out in front."

The sidewalks were all scraped clean, but there was plenty of snow in the street. In the section of the city where Sunny Boy lived the traffic was not heavy and it was not dangerous to play in the street, especially on a snowy day, for very few automobiles or wagons went through Glenn Avenue then.

"Let's go to the top of the hill and all of us get on," suggested Oliver Dunlap. "It won't be hard for Toby to pull us if we're going down hill."

The street sloped slightly—not enough to be really called a hill. Still, if they walked two blocks up, where the avenue started abruptly, there would be enough of a grade to give them a little coast, especially if Toby helped them by pulling.

"You know," said Sunny Boy, as they walked up the street, "if we had some milk to sell we could play we were milkmen with a dog cart;

you know like the picture in Miss Curry's book."

Miss Curry had shown the class a book a few weeks before and Sunny Boy had been especially interested in the pictures. There was one which showed how milk was delivered in a foreign city—a woman took it around in cans and the cans were in a little cart drawn by a dog that looked something like Toby.

"That was a nice milkman—that one who said you didn't throw the snowball and told Mr. Lambert so," Nelson remembered.

"Yes, and I don't believe Mr. Lambert thinks you threw it, either," chimed in Oliver Dunlap. "Jack Spratt is the meanest boy in the whole school."

"Mrs. Speck is getting better," said Sunny Boy. "Daddy and I went to see her yesterday. Her ankle is a lot better."

"My mother is going to see her this afternoon, if the dressmaker gets through in time," Nelson announced.

By this time the boys had reached the begin-

ning of the street and they carefully backed Toby around and headed him the right way.

"I'd better drive," said Sunny Boy, "because Toby minds me. Please, Nelson, don't stick your feet in me, will you?"

"I don't mean to," Nelson apologized, "but I have to put them somewhere. I let them stick out once and I got caught in a fence."

Sunny Boy sighed. His old sled wasn't very long, and with three boys on it there wasn't an inch of room to spare. He had to double himself up and Nelson had a dreadful time getting his feet and legs on—they were pretty long legs for a boy Nelson's size. Fat little Oliver Dunlap merely hooked his hand into the belt of Nelson's overcoat and hung on mysteriously by his knees—Oliver's daddy said he was as good as a fly when it came to hanging on to sleds.

"All ready?" asked Sunny Boy. "Gid-ap, Toby!"

They started. The sled was heavy enough to slip over the snow as Toby pulled it, a little

jerkily, it is true, but very cheerfully. Sunny Boy knew he was pulling cheerfully, for the dog's brown eyes looked smiling every time he turned his head to see why his passengers were making such a noise.

"Oh, Mamma, see the dog pulling the boys!" cried a little girl standing on the sidewalk.

"Drive past our house, Sunny Boy," urged Nelson. "I want Mother to see me."

Sunny Boy meant to do that—he wanted his mother and Harriet to see him, too. But you never can tell what is in store for you—Harriet often said that to Sunny Boy and this afternoon he found out that you never can tell.

When they were within a block of the house, Toby discovered a large black cat staring at him from behind an ash can. Perhaps she called him names—Sunny Boy always insisted that she did—and of course a dog never lets a cat call him names.

Before the boys knew what he was doing, Toby had jumped for the cat. She turned and

ran, dashing around the corner. After her went Toby, jerking after him the sled and the three bewildered boys on it. There was a fearful crash as Toby knocked over a couple of ash cans and then the sled tilted and Sunny Boy felt himself falling backward on Nelson and Oliver who yelled lustily.

CHAPTER X

THE SLED RACE

GET off of me!" Oliver was shouting. "Hey, Nelson, get off of me."

"I can't—Sunny Boy is on top of me," giggled Nelson.

Toby was nowhere in sight. He had wrenched himself free of the rope harness and was probably still chasing the impudent black cat.

Sunny Boy rolled off the sled into the snow and sat up. He saw that they were tilted against the snow-covered steps of a vacant house. The nose of the sled was pointing straight up and footprints showed where Toby had dashed up the steps in pursuit of the cat.

"It's a good thing you took your old sled, Sunny Boy," said Nelson. "One of the runners is cracked."

Sunny Boy looked at his sled.

"I can mend it with wire," he declared. "Daddy showed me how. Let's go home and get some wire."

When they reached Sunny Boy's house, there was Toby sitting on the front steps and looking as peaceful and innocent as though he had never chased a cat in his life.

"Is that you, Sunny Boy?" said Harriet, opening the door. "I thought Toby was pulling you boys on the sled."

"He was, but he saw a cat," Sunny Boy explained, and that made Harriet laugh so much she almost forgot to tell him that his mother wanted him.

"Mr. Lambert was here while you were out," added Harriet.

Sunny Boy and Nelson and Oliver stared at each other. What could the principal have had to say?

"Your mother said to tell you to come in as soon as you came," said Harriet. "Nelson and

Oliver can come in, too—please wipe your feet.”

Sunny Boy’s daddy often laughed at Harriet—she wouldn’t let Toby come into the house if his feet were muddy or snowy and she wouldn’t let any of Sunny Boy’s friends in unless they wiped their shoes very carefully on the doormat or took off their rubbers. But Sunny Boy might tramp right over her freshly scrubbed kitchen floor and Harriet never said a word.

“Harriet lets Sunny Boy do *anything*,” Ruth Baker had once told her mother.

Mrs. Horton was sewing in the window seat in the living room and she seemed very glad to see the three boys.

“Harriet said Mr. Lambert was here!” exclaimed Sunny Boy, looking around as though he half expected to see the principal under the sofa or a chair.

“He was, dear,” Mrs. Horton answered. “And, Sunny Boy, what do you think? He came to tell me that it has been proved you didn’t throw the snowball that struck Mrs. Speck.”

Nelson and Oliver looked delighted and before Sunny Boy could speak, Nelson said:

“Jack Spratt threw it, didn’t he?”

Mrs. Horton smiled a little.

“Well, yes, so Mr. Lambert said,” she admitted. “But I don’t want Sunny Boy to think of that first. The most important thing is that the principal is convinced Sunny Boy told the truth when he said he did not throw the ball.”

Then while Sunny Boy and Nelson and Oliver sat cross-legged on the floor and ate apples, she told them what Mr. Lambert had told her. Each time the principal went to see Mrs. Speck she was so insistent that Sunny Boy Horton could not have thrown the snowball if he said he didn’t, that Mr. Lambert had determined to make an investigation for himself. He found any number of boys who remembered that Sunny Boy had been standing very near Jack Spratt and finally he had discovered three children, two boys and a girl, who lived on Marion Avenue, but went to another school. They all declared that

"the big boy in the red sweater threw the snowball that knocked the old lady down."

"But there was Mrs. Deaner who had said that she saw Sunny Boy throw the ball," went on Mrs. Horton. "So Mr. Lambert went to see her, and after she had tried very hard to remember everything that had happened that morning, she recollected that after she had seen Sunny Boy throw one snowball, her telephone bell rang. She answered the call and when she came back to the window poor old Mrs. Speck had been hit—and Mrs. Deaner was so sure Sunny Boy had thrown the ball that she thought she had actually seen him throw it. Of course, as soon as she remembered about the telephone call, she could see that much might have happened while she was away from the window. Mr. Lambert said he had always been sure that Sunny Boy was mistakenly accused."

When Sunny Boy went back to school Monday the news was known all over school. Everyone was pleased except Jack Spratt and, strange

to say, he was not angry at the principal, who had scolded him severely, but at Sunny Boy, who surely was not to blame.

"I'll get even with that Sunny Boy Horton yet," blustered Jack. "He thinks he is smart, crawling out of a hole like that, but I'll fix him. You just wait and see."

Sunny Boy was too happy to be bothered much by this grumbling, and Miss Curry positively beamed. Mr. Lambert had sent her word that Sunny Boy's deportment mark need not lower the class record, after all. He couldn't have an A on his card, because he had thrown snowballs on the street and that really was breaking a rule, but he might have a B on his card, and that would not lower the class record, for B was, after all, a high mark.

It was Handy Lee who suggested a sled race that week. There had been more snow, and, as Handy said, they might never have such a splendid winter again. Handy thought that school should close as long as the snow lasted, but as

that couldn't be managed, he said the next best thing was to play outdoors as much as possible.

"We could have a race on Abbot Hill," said Handy. "With elimination trials and everything. Then the winners from each class could go in the finals."

This sounded exciting and it was just the way the high school boys talked when they had their field day. Sunny Boy was eager to go in the race, and maybe he wasn't glad he had saved his beautiful new red sled.

"It's a racer, too," he said proudly.

Handy Lee and three of his chums—boys in the eighth grade—made all the plans, and every afternoon for a week the boys went over to Abbot Hill and tried out their sleds. Handy was openly anxious for Sunny Boy to represent his grade and Jack Spratt scowled at him fearfully when he won a race against Herbert Gregory, a boy Sunny Boy hardly knew but who was always tagging after Jack.

"He runs all his errands for him, and that's

why Jack likes him,” said Carleton Adams.

Carleton had to watch the fun, standing on his crutches, but he did not miss a single elimination race, and when Sunny Boy was finally declared his class winner, no one was more pleased than Carleton.

“The four winners from the primary grades are to race each other,” announced Handy, “and then the four winners from the grammar school.”

Handy was to represent his own grade and Jack Spratt was the winner in the seventh—he was a good coaster if he wasn’t very pleasant, as Sunny Boy had to point out to Nelson who, if he could have had his way, would not have let Jack coast at all.

The race was to be on Saturday morning and it was not till the last minute Friday afternoon that Handy declared himself satisfied and announced that all the details were settled.

“Leave your sleds down in the furnace room,” suggested Handy. “We have to meet here tomorrow morning, anyway, and we might as well

save ourselves the bother of dragging the sleds back and forth."

The janitor was willing for the eight sleds to be stored in his dry light furnace room, and the boys separated, Handy making them promise solemnly to be on hand at nine o'clock the next morning.

"Gee, isn't it cold!" cried Oliver Dunlap, as he and Sunny Boy came out of the school building.

"Yes, and I hope it keeps this way," Handy Lee, who was directly behind them, said. "It's too cold to snow, and if it stays cold they'll sweep the river off and then my cousin will get his ice-boat out."

Sunny Boy galloped home, but even then his fingers were stinging and his cheeks were so red that Harriet told him she thought at first he was an apple.

It was still cold in the morning, but, naturally, good coasting weather is always cold. Sunny Boy was so eager to get to school and get his sled

that he could easily have skipped the oatmeal if his daddy had not suggested that hot oatmeal was very important in the winter, whether you were going to enter a coasting race or explore for the north pole. So Sunny Boy ate his breakfast properly. Then he whistled three times outside of Nelson's house and Nelson came out and joined him and they hurried off to the school yard.

Early as it was, there were thirty or forty boys on hand and Oliver Dunlap and Jimmie Butterworth were among them. They clattered down the basement stairs with Sunny Boy to get his sled.

"It isn't here!" cried Sunny Boy, as soon as he saw the sleds.

"Why, you left it here—it must be here somewhere," Jimmie Butterworth argued.

"Maybe you took it home and forgot it," ventured Nelson, perplexed.

"No, he didn't," Oliver Dunlap retorted. "I went home with him and he didn't have his sled."

There were only seven sleds in the furnace room and the one that was missing was the beautiful swift red racer that belonged to Sunny Boy.

“Ask the janitor!” cried several voices, for more boys were crowding into the room. “Ask the janitor if he did anything with your sled, Sunny Boy.”

The janitor had not seen the sled and he declared that no one could get into the building when he wasn't there and take a sled away.

CHAPTER XI

THE ICE-BOAT CREW

DO you kids think we have all day for this race?" demanded Handy Lee suddenly from the doorway.

He had come down to see what was keeping the boys so long.

"My sled's gone," explained Sunny Boy.

"Your sled?" Handy echoed. "Why, you put it down here last night, didn't you? Where could it go? Who took it?"

Sunny Boy shook his head. He couldn't answer those questions.

"Did anybody look around?" demanded Handy impatiently. "Well, look some more. A sled couldn't disappear unless some one helped it."

But though the boys, aided by the janitor,

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searched the building thoroughly—they even looked in the most impossible places, like under the radiators—and hunted in every corner of the yard, not a sign of that beautiful red sled could be found.

“It’s nine o’clock now,” said Jack Spratt crossly, when the big school clock showed the hour. “If we’re going to race we’d better go on over to the hill.”

“But Sunny Boy hasn’t any sled,” Handy argued. “Unless he has another one—have you another sled, Sunny Boy?”

“The runner’s cracked,” said Sunny Boy.

“Well, let Herbert Gregory represent the class,” Jack suggested. “He was next to Sunny Boy and it’s only fair to let him take his place.”

“He can lend Sunny Boy his sled,” said Handy stubbornly.

But Jack wouldn’t agree to this. He said—with some truth—that the race had been planned for boys to show their skill with their own sleds and that if Herbert had been next to the winner

in the elimination races he should be allowed to race his sled in the final race if Sunny Boy had lost his sled. Sunny Boy said this was fair, too.

“All right, let Herbert go in then,” Handy gave up. “But if I ever find out who took Sunny Boy’s sled—” He didn’t finish his sentence, but the way he scowled showed that Handy Lee was not likely to be very pleasant toward that person.

Sunny Boy and his friends went to watch the race and they were glad when Handy won from Jack Spratt. Herbert Gregory didn’t win, after all, but let a younger boy with a smaller sled “walk right away from him,” as Nelson said scornfully. Every one who had expected to see Sunny Boy in the race was surprised to find him standing at the top of the hill, and when they heard that the sled was lost they were very sorry for him and offered to help him hunt for it.

But the sled had disappeared. It was as though the furnace-room floor had opened and swallowed it. Though, as Ruth Baker pointed

out to Sunny Boy, if that had happened *all* the sleds would have been swallowed.

"Maybe it will come back," said Sunny Boy hopefully, and he decided to try to stop thinking about the sled.

Handy's hopes for cold weather were dashed by another heavy fall of snow and Ruth Baker began to remind Sunny Boy and Nelson that they had promised to build her a snowman.

"The biggest one that was ever built," demanded Ruth modestly. "And right in our yard so I can see it from the window when I get up. I want him to have a hat on and everything."

Sunny Boy and Nelson decided that they might as well build the snowman the day after the snowstorm. Ruth was willing to help and Oliver Dunlap and Jimmie Butterworth decided that if this was going to be the largest snowman ever built, it was their duty to help build him.

"I'll bring over all the snow in our yard," said Sunny Boy generously.

He harnessed up Toby to the old sled and

Harriet found him an empty peach basket and this, lined with old newspapers, really held a good deal of snow. It was fun to pack it in and load it on the sled, and before the boys could begin building the snowman each one had to have his turn at loading up the snow wagon, as they called the sled.

“Would you like him sitting down or standing up, Ruth?” asked Sunny Boy capably.

“Standing up,” said Ruth promptly.

The snow packed so well that the snowman could be provided with what Sunny Boy called “standing up legs.” You know when the snow is soft a snowman simply has to sit down and stick his legs straight out in front of him. This snowman had pretty thick legs when the boys finished them, but then he needed thick legs—almost like porch columns—to stand on, because the rest of him was going to be large.

“I’ll get some coal to make buttons for him,” offered Nelson, as the body of the snowman began to take shape.

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He dashed down into the cellar and brought up several lumps of coal, enough to give the snowman a double-breasted coat and a scarfpin.

"Don't forget the hat," said Ruth, who was having a beautiful time.

The snowman had a large round body and a smaller, round head and his arms were crossed over his chest. They had to be because they wouldn't stay on if they were allowed to stick straight out.

"We'll have to have a ladder," said Sunny Boy, whose arms ached from reaching up so much. "We can't put his ears on and fix his nose and put on his hat without a ladder to stand on."

Sunny Boy knew where the stepladder was in his house—at the top of the cellar stairs. He ran over and asked Harriet if he might borrow it.

"As long as you don't fall off it," said Harriet. "Do please be careful, won't you?"

Sunny Boy said he would, and Harriet helped

him down the back steps with the ladder and Nelson and Oliver helped him drag it across the yard and set it up beside the snowman.

“Let me put on the ears,” said Nelson.

“Then I’m going to put on his nose,” Oliver chimed in.

“Let Sunny Boy fix his hat,” said Ruth, and she hurried into the house and came out with an old soft felt hat of her daddy’s and gave it to Sunny Boy.

Nelson climbed up the ladder, which wobbled just a little, and plastered two wide ears on the snowman. Nelson rather wanted to stay up on the ladder longer, but Oliver gave it a tremendous lurch, just to remind him that he had not yet had his turn. So Nelson came down hastily and up went Oliver with a handful of snow to be molded into a nose—“a nice nose,” Ruth was careful to specify.

“How does that look?” asked Oliver when he had the nose in place.

“It looks fine,” Ruth approved. “I guess he

is the best-looking snowman that was ever made."

It was lucky the snowman couldn't be made vain, because such praise might have gone to his head.

Oliver came down reluctantly and Sunny Boy started up the ladder with the hat in his hand. Half way up he dropped it.

"Wait till I get up and then you can throw it to me," he called.

The stepladder wasn't very high, but it seemed higher than usual when all Sunny Boy could see around it was snow and more snow instead of the walls of a room or the curtains at the windows. He noticed Toby as he reached the top step—the dog was watching him intently, his red tongue hanging out, for even in cold weather Toby often went "Ha-ha."

"'Lo, Toby!" called Sunny Boy, waving his hand.

Nelson, who was holding the ladder steady, turned his head to see the dog. The ladder



“‘Lo, Toby!” called Sunny Boy, waving his hand

swayed, Sunny Boy slipped, and before any one had realized what was happening, he had rolled off and landed in the snow.

Luckily the ladder did not fall on him, but Sunny Boy at first was not aware of his good luck. He felt himself strike the ground, then he heard a cry from Ruth, and the next instant something hard and cold had toppled on him. Snow was in his mouth and eyes and snow was going down his neck.

“Oh-h, the snowman!” Ruth wailed loudly. “The snowman fell on Sunny Boy!”

Well, so it had, and Nelson was quite shocked that his sister should be more worried about the snowman than she was about Sunny Boy. He and Oliver had to roll the cannon ball of snow that had made the snowman’s body off of Sunny Boy, while Ruth sat down in the snow and held the snowman’s head tenderly in her arms.

“The ladder knocked one of his legs out from under him,” explained Nelson, “and that made him fall down on you.”

Sunny Boy stood up and looked at the wreck.

"We can fix him, Ruth," he said confidently. "Perhaps he had better be a sitting down snowman—then you can put on his ears or anything that happens to melt off."

Ruth had been anxious for a tall snowman, but she could see the advantage in a statue that she herself could reach, so she consented amiably enough to have the snowman rebuilt as Sunny Boy suggested. It was lucky that she did, for just as Sunny Boy was putting the head on the snowman, Jimmie Butterworth came back. He had just melted away, as he had a habit of doing, and the others had scarcely missed him.

"I've been over to the river," he announced. "They're sweeping it off. Come on and get your skates."

Ruth couldn't go, but she had her snowman to keep her happy. Sunny Boy and Nelson and Oliver scattered to get their skates and in a few minutes they were hurrying off with Jimmie. The river was not very wide nor very deep where

it cut through Centronia, but further down the state it broadened out and big ships came to the wharves of other cities.

"There's a big crowd over there already," reported Jimmie, almost running. "I heard a man say they're getting the ice-boats out."

The ice had been scraped when the boys reached the river. There was a small crowd of skaters darting back and forth and a larger crowd standing on the shore watching two boys who were working over an ice-boat.

Sunny Boy had seen ice-boats, but he had never been on one. They always reminded him of dragon flies—a dragon fly, he had explained to Harriet, was all wings and very little body and an ice-boat seemed to be all sail and very little boat.

"That boat belongs to Lex Davis," said Jimmie Butterworth. "He's Handy Lee's cousin."

And there was Handy Lee, standing close to the boat and handing screw drivers and hammers to his cousin with a very important air.

"Hello," said Lex Davis, looking up as Sunny Boy and his friends drew near. "Say, Charlie, here's the ballast we need."

Sunny Boy knew Charlie Wayne by sight—he was an older brother of Marshall Wayne, who had recited with Nelson Baker in the Thanksgiving exercises at school. Charlie and Lex were high school students and of course had very little to do with the boys who went to the Marion Avenue school.

"The boys are going to try out the boat," said Handy Lee, beaming, "and they want a crowd. Lex says it goes better with a crowd. Do you want to go?"

Did they want to go? Why, Sunny Boy and Nelson and Jimmie and Oliver decided at once that all their lives they had wanted to be asked to take a sail in an ice-boat. Marshall Wayne was going, too. He was so afraid that he might be forgotten that he had climbed into the boat and sat there refusing to budge, though his feet were cold and he would have been much more

comfortable if he had moved around and made himself useful until it was time to start.

"All right, we'll sign you up," grunted Lex Davis, for he was crouched down, doing something to a runner of the boat. "But you'll have to hang on and look out for yourselves. Once this bird starts on her way I can't stop to pick up any lads who may fall out."

"We won't fall out," promised Sunny Boy.

"We want to get clear of the crowd," Charlie Wayne said, speaking more to Lex than to the younger boys. "If you run into a crowd like this with an ice-boat, some one is sure to get hurt."

"Sure, we'll head her downstream," agreed Lex. "Well, I've done my best—that may hold and it may not. Handy, have you signed up a crew?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" Handy Lee saluted with a grin. "Sunny Boy Horton, Nelson Baker, Jimmie Butterworth, Marshall Wayne, and Oliver Dunlap—all good men, sir."

"A little light as to weight," said Lex Davis critically, "but then they won't take up much room either. Hop in and hang on—as skipper, those are instructions from my heart."

"Button up your coats and pull down your caps and get into your gloves, too," Charlie Wayne added. "You'll feel a breeze in a minute, and after we have started there won't be any chance to make yourselves comfortable."

The boys hastily crammed their caps more tightly over their ears and Jimmie buttoned up his mackinaw, which was usually left flopping open. Sunny Boy was glad he had worn his windbreaker under his coat, and Oliver hastily decided to put on his new knitted gloves, though he had told his mother that only girls wore gloves.

They scrambled aboard the boat and the little circle of boys and girls watching scattered suddenly. There was no telling in which direction the boat might swoop at the start.

"There's Jack Spratt," said Nelson. "Over

there on the other side. I'll bet he wishes he was going."

"I'm surprised Handy didn't ask him," Lex Davis declared. "There is still time—how about it, Handy?"

Good-natured Handy Lee scowled terrifically.

"If he comes on board, I'll go off," he said.

"There isn't time for all that shifting," Lex drawled provokingly. "Guess we'll have to sail as is. Somebody keep an eye on Sunny Boy Horton because he might fall off and he is so small he wouldn't even make a crash to warn us."

Sunny Boy grinned, his eyes sparkling. He was having such a good time!

Lex put the sail over, there was a shout from the shore, and like a bird the boat was off down the ice.

"I never knew—it was—so fast!" gasped Sunny Boy in Nelson's ear.

Nelson was surprised, too, though he didn't intend to admit it. He knew there were ice-

boat races on the river, but he had thought they were ordinary races, like the sled races on Abbot Hill. Nelson had never, in all his life, felt the wind sing in his ears as it was singing now.

"Bump ahead—hold fast!" shouted Charlie Wayne.

The ice was, in fact, very uneven. The boat hit a hummock, gave an unmerciful jolt, and settled down to skimming for another yard or so. Then there was another bump in the ice that seemed to lift it straight up into the air and it came down with a thud that made Marshall Wayne bite his tongue and Lex Davis frown with anxiety.

"One more like that and we'll have a mashed runner," he shouted to Charlie, who nodded to show he heard.

They were farther down the river now than Sunny Boy had ever been. The crowd had long ago been left behind and the shores on both sides of them loomed up wild and rocky and deserted. The sun had gone in and the heavy gray sky

seemed to be very close to the frozen river—Sunny Boy had an odd idea that he could touch it, if he were a few inches taller.

“Look out!” cried Handy Lee, pointing ahead.

Sunny Boy saw a wide dark mark that he knew must be a crack in the ice. Lex Davis saw it, too—he turned the boat directly for the opposite shore. The boat seemed to be headed for a group of rocks, but before any one could utter a word, there was a loud crash. Sunny Boy shut his eyes tightly and felt himself flung headlong.

CHAPTER XII

PRISONERS

SUNNY BOY opened his eyes. Then he closed them hastily, for something had splashed into them.

"Sunny Boy!" he heard some one calling—it sounded like Lex Davis.

Sunny Boy opened his eyes again. He was lying on a very comfortable snow bank and, sitting up, he discovered that those black figures down on the ice were the other boys.

"Oh!" said Sunny Boy, his eyes roving to the rocks. "The boat did have a collision."

He felt another wet splash—on his cheek this time. It was snowing!

"Well, say, you're as cool as cucumber," Handy Lee greeted him a little crossly. "Didn't

you hear Lex calling you? He's scared about you. Are you hurt?"

"Of course I'm not," said Sunny Boy, standing up. "I was just finding out where I was. We hit a rock, didn't we?"

Handy had already turned and was hurrying back to the others and Sunny Boy followed him. They had been flung like so many sticks of wood when the boat crashed, but no one was hurt, not even Marshall Wayne who had been sent spinning over the ice like a hockey puck.

"Are you hurt, Sunny Boy?" demanded Lex Davis, as soon as he saw him. "Did you strike a rock?"

"I'm all right," Sunny Boy insisted. "It's snowing again, isn't it?"

"Come here while I look you over," ordered Lex, and he made Sunny Boy stand still while he felt of his arms and legs and poked him in the ribs.

"It's a miracle," Lex admitted, when he had found that Sunny Boy was really all right. "It

sure is a miracle, but we seem to be all here."

"The boat is wrecked, though," mourned Handy Lee.

"Good grief, what is a boat or two?" Lex retorted. "I can get another boat or get along without any boat. But if I had smashed up any of you kids I'd hate to have to go home and tell your mothers."

Charlie Wayne glanced up at the clouds.

"By the way, how do we get home?" he inquired. "Unless my bones deceive me, we're in for a good blizzard."

The snow was coming down in earnest now and already the ice was covered with a white film. Lex straightened up from an examination of the hopelessly splintered boat and frowned a little.

"We must be ten or twelve miles from home," he admitted. "I suppose there is nothing to do but walk till we come to some house where we can telephone or get a lift of some kind. We'd better not waste any more time here. Come on, kids, we're going to walk."

A sudden gust of wind almost took Sunny Boy's breath away. He felt an arm thrust through his and Handy Lee's voice said in his ear:

"You'd better stick with me, Sunny Boy—you might get blown clear across the river."

There wasn't much danger of that, but Sunny Boy was very glad to have the sturdy Handy to cling to. The wind was very strong and the snow was so thick that they could not see the other side of the river. They seemed to be shut in by a veil of snow that stung their faces as they trudged after Lex Davis, who was in the lead. He had placed the younger boys, Oliver and Nelson and Jimmie behind him and Handy and Marshall were told off to watch Sunny Boy, while Charlie Wayne brought up the rear of the procession. Lex was afraid that Sunny Boy might get separated from the group or slip through a crack in the ice and he meant to take no chances of losing him.

"We'd better stay close to the shore," Lex

shouted to Charlie, "because we'll lose all sense of direction if we strike out. There must be a road or a trail of some kind that comes down to the river, if we hunt long enough."

It was bitterly cold and already growing dark—the short winter afternoon had been half over when they left Centronia. Oliver Dunlap complained that his shoe hurt and Charlie Wayne shouted to Lex that there was no use in going any further.

"It's a blizzard," cried Charlie hoarsely, "and we'll have to crawl in somewhere and wait. If you keep moving till some of the kids fall down then we'll be in a far worse fix than we are now."

Watching Lex, Sunny Boy suddenly saw him hold up his hand.

"Here's a place under a cliff," Lex called loudly, and even then the wind carried half his words away and the boys had to guess from his motions what he wanted them to do.

"Get under!" Lex kept shouting. "Get under!"

Go as far back as you can. It's a sort of shelter, and at least we'll be out of the wind."

They had to get on their hands and knees to crawl under the ledge, but once they had wriggled across the ice, they found themselves in a fairly large space, hollowed out enough so that even Lex, the tallest, could stand up. It was open on one side, too, an opening that Lex had not been able to see because of the storm.

"Isn't it still!" cried Sunny Boy in delight.

They were out of the wind and the snow and by contrast the little place under the cliff seemed warm and cozy to them. Handy Lee said he wished they had brought blankets and Lex told him while he was about it he might as well wish for a fire and some ham and eggs and a few feather beds and a radio set.

"I can go to sleep without any feather beds," said Handy sturdily, and he gave a tremendous yawn.

All the boys were sleepy after their battle against the wind and Lex announced that since

there was nothing else to do, they might as well go to sleep.

"We'll not freeze, packed in here eight deep," he explained, "and perhaps the storm will graciously let up after we've had a few hours' rest."

The last thing Sunny Boy remembered was nodding against Lex's shoulder. Then he had a confused impression that Lex was pulling him into his lap and when he woke up and found it pitch dark, he found he *was* on Lex's lap, his head tucked comfortably under the older boy's chin.

"Lie still," whispered Lex, as he felt Sunny Boy stirring. "I thought I could keep you warmer this way. You've had a fine nap."

"I thought--didn't I hear something?" Sunny Boy whispered back.

"Sh! Don't wake the others. I heard it, too," admitted Lex. "It sounded like a landslide to me. Maybe we'll find some of the mountain half way across the river in the morning."

"I never heard a landslide before," whispered

Sunny Boy sleepily. "I never—saw a—land—," but he was asleep again before he had finished his sentence.

It was Lex who woke Sunny Boy the next time. He was trying to put Sunny Boy down on the ground without waking him up, but Sunny's eyes flew open and he said:

"Is it morning?"

"I don't know," Lex answered in a puzzled tone. "The light is so queer—hello, every one's awake now."

The boys sat up, rubbing their stiff arms and legs and stared at each other a few minutes before they recollected where they were.

"Is it morning?" asked Handy Lee, exactly as Sunny Boy had done.

Lex and Charlie looked at their watches.

"Seven o'clock. What makes it look so funny?" Charlie said.

"I'm going to find out," declared Lex, and he made for the largest opening.

"What do you know about that?" he said the

next moment in an odd tone. "Sunny Boy, remember that noise we heard in the night?"

Sunny Boy nodded, while the boys who had heard nothing, stared.

"Well, it was a landslide, all right," announced Lex. "About a ton of snow has slipped down and blocked us."

"How can snow be a landslide?" asked Handy curiously.

"Call it an avalanche, if you prefer," Lex retorted.

"Let's get out of here," suggested Marshall Wayne. "I'm starving to death."

Sunny Boy caught Lex's eye.

"I don't believe we can get out," said Sunny Boy quietly.

Charlie Wayne had been to look at the opening and now he came back and sat down without saying a word.

"Lood here," Lex addressed the boys good-naturedly, but with something in his voice that made them look at him attentively. "It's just as

Sunny Boy says. We can't get out. If we all pushed together, we couldn't hope to budge that mass of snow and ice. There's nothing to do but sit tight and keep quiet and perhaps after a while it will melt enough to let us tunnel through."

There was a moment of silence—they were all thinking. Each one wondered how long they might have to stay, bottled up like flies in a glass.

Charlie Wayne reached into the pocket of his mackinaw and brought out a flat cake of chocolate.

"Meanwhile," he said cheerfully, "suppose we have breakfast."

There wasn't much chocolate, of course, when it was divided among eight, but anything was better than no breakfast at all. All the boys were hungrier than they had been in their lives, for none of them had ever missed dinner and breakfast before.

"Gee, I never did like oatmeal very much,"

sighed Nelson; "but what wouldn't I give just now——"

"For eggs and—" broke in Oliver.

But Oliver, too, was interrupted by Lex who commanded him briefly and a little sharply to stop talking of food.

"It's bad enough without that," added Lex.

"Marshall looks as though he saw ghosts," remarked Handy Lee rather thoughtlessly.

"Everybody up," commanded Lex. "What we need is exercise."

He put them through a few bending and twisting exercises that left them gasping, but feeling thoroughly warmed through. Sunny Boy dropped down on the ground to rest and to his surprise heard Marshall Wayne whisper to him.

"Sunny Boy," whispered Marshall. "I want to tell you something. I don't think we're ever going to get out of here. I've read of people being buried alive and by and by they died. I want to tell you something."

"I don't think we're going to die," said Sunny Boy, forgetting to whisper, "but go ahead and tell it."

Charlie Wayne was staring at his younger brother.

"So you really have something on your conscience," he commented. "I've thought so for some time. Go ahead and get it off your chest."

Marshall turned very red. He had not counted on having an audience. But he was in earnest and determined not to die before he had told Sunny Boy a certain secret.

"You know your sled, Sunny Boy?" he said. "The sled you were going to have in the race? Well, it's in that old shack on the vacant lot near the school—you know the place where you fell down the chimney."

"My new sled?" asked Sunny Boy. "The sled I left down in the furnace room?"

"Yes, your new sled," Marshall returned.

"But how did it get in the old shack?" asked the puzzled Sunny Boy.

Marshall gulped. He saw that he could not hide anything.

"I helped Jack Spratt," he confessed. "That is, I got your sled out of the furnace room for him because he said he wanted to coast just once on it. But he ran off and dropped it down the hole in the roof of the shack and then he said he'd keep me off the ball team in the spring if I told any one, so I never said a word."

CHAPTER XIII

OUT AGAIN

SUNNY BOY had once heard Handy Lee say that Charlie Wayne had a quick temper. Now when he saw him look at his brother, it seemed easy to believe.

"If I only had room enough," said Charlie crossly, "I'd shake you till your teeth rattled."

"Well, we haven't got the space, so calm down, Charlie," Lex advised. "Sunny Boy will have his sled and that's the important thing."

"But maybe he won't ever get out of here to play with it," said Marshall, looking as though he might be about to cry.

Sunny Boy laughed outright at this and Lex declared that he would shake Marshall, whether there was room enough or not, if he didn't stop talking like that.

"You said Sunny Boy will have his sled," objected Nelson. "But if we don't get out——"

"I'll shake everybody in just about two minutes," Lex growled, pretending to be very much put out indeed, "unless you keep still for as long as—well, as long as you can."

"If we hadn't come in the ice-boat," said Sunny Boy thoughtfully, forgetting to keep still, "Toby could trail me."

"That's so, he could," Nelson agreed. "Toby can always find you. Remember when he came to school and jumped upon the platform while you were saying your piece?"

"If we had something to chop with, perhaps we could break through the snow and ice," said Handy Lee dejectedly.

Lex Davis did not say anything to this and Sunny Boy stole a glance at him. Lex looked very serious and for the first time Sunny Boy wondered whether they would really have to stay sealed up in the hole under the cliff until they died right there. He tried to whisper a question

to Nelson Baker about this, but Lex heard him.

"I don't think for one minute that we'll *die* here, Sunny Boy," he said kindly. "We seem to have enough air for comfortable breathing and in that respect we're far better off than the miners who get trapped under the earth; but I do know that the longer we have to go without food, the weaker we'll be and we may not be able to stand the cold without getting sick. But as far as starving to death goes, we're all fairly husky specimens and I don't think we'll starve before we get out of here."

"I'm starving now," declared Marshall Wayne, and Lex made a lunge at him.

"What time is it now?" Oliver Dunlap asked.

"Nine o'clock," said Lex. "I'm hoping the sun will soften up this mass of snow and ice and then we can dig our way out; the trouble is, I can't be sure the sun is shining."

"Why, if it is still snowing, the snow will be over our heads," Charlie Wayne cried. "It can't possibly be snowing yet."

But as the hands of Lex's watch crept around and each time the boys tried kicking the snow that blocked their escape it seemed more like cement than ever, they were forced to conclude either that there was no sunshine outside or that the day was very cold.

"I have a knife," said Lex Davis at last, "and I think I'll have to try my luck with it. If we're ever going to get out of here, we'll have to take a chance. I'll start tunneling and the rest of you stand by to give me a lift when my wrist gives out."

He took a heavy jack-knife from his pocket and opened the single thick blade.

"As nearly as I can tell," he explained to the interested boys, "this landslide, as I call it, is snow and ice. The soft snow will be even worse than the ice to get through, because it is likely to fall in on us and perhaps suffocate us. There's a cheerful thought for you, Marshall."

Lex grinned, but Sunny Boy was sure he was anxious. However, Lex had been captain of the

high school football team that fall and he could think a great many thoughts without putting them into words. Sunny Boy knew that if there was any way to get out of the pocket, or cave, in which they were trapped, Lex Davis would never give up until he had found that way.

Lex began to work, and when his wrist ached so much that he could no longer hide the fact that it was paining him, Charlie Wayne took the knife and began to chop. It was very slow work and at last the younger lads had to take turns because the knife was such a poor tool they had to work hard and long to make even the smallest headway.

"Look out for the snow," warned Lex, when he struck a soft spot.

He did not dare try to cut through to the air, because he did not know how much snow was piled up. Instead he contented himself with making a tunnel barely large enough for a boy to wriggle through on his stomach. The snow that was chiseled out had to be carried back into

the cave, and finally the boys conceived the notion of relaying it—passing a great heap of snow from hand to hand.

Sunny Boy, wriggling slowly after Handy Lee, tried not to imagine what would happen to them if the slide should suddenly drop in on them or how he would feel if snow should fall between him and the boys ahead and block him off from the others. It was pitch dark in the tunnel, and Sunny Boy had to feel his way blindly along.

“It’s been an awful long time since I did any digging,” he thought, moving on an inch as he heard Handy moving ahead of him. “I wonder if Lex doesn’t want us to do any more—Oh!”

No wonder Sunny Boy gave a little cry. Some one had grabbed hold of him and pulled him swiftly out of the dark tunnel.

“Don’t give a peep!” said Lex Davis fiercely to him, putting him down on the ground beside Handy. “I have to get the others.”

“He grabbed me just like that, too,” Handy



Some one had grabbed hold of him and pulled him swiftly
out of the dark tunnel

confided to the bewildered Sunny Boy. "I never knew we were any where near through and all of a sudden Lex gives me an awful jerk and hauls me out. He said he didn't dare tell the boys he had tunneled through for fear they would get excited and try to crowd out, or else kick around so much they would bring down the whole mountain on top of them."

One by one Lex and Charlie pulled out the delighted boys. It was snowing steadily, the sky was lead gray, and they were on a rocky shore with not a house in sight, but every one of them would have declared it was the most beautiful world he had ever seen.

"Gosh!" said Lex simply, when he and Charlie saw six boys safely sitting on the ground.

"That took us just one hour and a half and I don't care if I never go through another hour and a half like it," Charlie added.

They turned and looked at the slide. Ice and snow and gravel and a few old dead trees had slipped down the cliff and extended some dis-

tance out into the river. A great bare place on the cliff showed where the mass had started from.

"Can't let you sit there," said Lex briskly. "We have to find a place to eat. Now save your breath for the climb and don't grunt and try not to mind the snow. There's a road somewhere at the top of this silly cliff, for I've traveled it in the summer time."

Sunny Boy was so tired he was sure he couldn't get up. And then, after he stood up, he was so hungry that he was sure he couldn't go another step. But when he saw Lex looking at him anxiously—he remembered how tired Lex must be, too, for he had done most of the work of making the tunnel—Sunny Boy tried to smile.

"That's the spirit!" Lex encouraged him. "Take hold of my belt, Sunny Boy, and I'll give you a lift. We'll pretend we are climbing the Alps."

All the boys who wore mackinaws—and most

of them did—unbuttoned the belts and tied them together to form a rope. Then Lex took one end of this and Charlie the other and the smaller boys were placed between and instructed to hang tightly to the belt-rope.

It was a terrific climb that Lex led them. He dared not stop to hunt for a trail, so he plunged into the snow and, coaxing and scolding, forced his companions to follow him. They had to steady themselves by the branches of bushes that stuck up here and there through the ice and snow and once Marshall Wayne slipped and refused to get up until his brother threatened to roll him down the hill and leave him there.

The snow stung their faces, they were all weak from hunger, and Sunny Boy was sure that his right hand had come off. He refused to look at it because, as he told Nelson, if it wasn't there he didn't wish to see that it wasn't there."

"I'll look for you," offered Nelson, and he was able to report that the hand was "on all right"

and when he whacked it smartly Sunny Boy had to admit that he felt the blows.

Then Sunny Boy stumbled, and though he meant to get up at once, it felt so pleasant to rest a moment that he lay very quietly and he was closing his eyes sleepily—he was *so* tired!—when some one pulled him to his feet and shook him gently.

“Can’t let you rest yet, old man,” said Lex Davis firmly. “Listen to me, Sunny Boy—you have to keep going. We’re almost at the top. You come along and walk with me and I’ll see that you keep awake.”

He took Sunny Boy by the hand and began to dog trot—not an easy thing to do on a steep hillside and in deep snow. Sunny Boy was jolted up and down and the motion shook him awake—he began to run, too.

“There’s the road!” shouted Handy Lee joyously, as, with one last mad scramble, Lex dragged them over the half-buried bushes and out on to a flat piece of land that might have

been a field or a table top—the boys were too tired to be sure which it was.

Handy explained later that he knew that they had reached the road because he saw telegraph poles. Certainly there was nothing else to mark it as a road. It was as badly drifted as the fields and no teams had been through that day, for there was not a footprint to mar the white surface.

“There’s a man!” exclaimed Sunny Boy suddenly.

Lex looked up. Coming toward them was a drooping figure, wrapped in a rubber poncho, or blanket, and mounted on a horse. Both rider and horse held their heads down against the storm, which was blinding.

“Shout at him!” commanded Lex.

The boys shouted in chorus and the man raised his head. They ran to meet him and the horse was so astonished to see eight strange figures come out of the veil of snow that he shied in alarm.

Lex and Charlie briefly outlined what had happened. They must, they explained, get home to Centronia.

"You can't," said the man bluntly. "I'm mail carrier and I never saw a worse storm than this in my life. You're a good twelve miles from Centronia by the road. I came only from Queentown, three miles east, and I've been six hours covering three miles. I'll telephone to some one for you when I get back this afternoon, if you like, but you can't get home till the roads are broken. You'd better go down the road a piece to Mrs. Camp's—she'll take you in and get you something to eat."

"All right—we'll do that," Charlie said.

Lex hastily wrote down his father's name and address and telephone number and added Sunny Boy's daddy's phone number, too, because Sunny Boy could remember it when he was asked. The others were too tired and hungry to think.

The mail carrier rode on and the boys plodded

silently in the other direction until they made out the dim outlines of a house.

“That must be Mrs. Camp’s,” said Lex, and they tramped wearily across what would be the lawn in summer and around to the kitchen door.

When, a half second later, Mrs. Camp answered the knock, she was startled to find eight boys on her doorstep and to hear one of them say loudly:

“Gee, I smell fried ham!”

CHAPTER XIV

VERY GOOD FRIENDS

GOODNESS me!" exclaimed Mrs. Camp, "where on earth did you come from?"

"Let 'em come in, Mother," a man's voice behind her urged. "You'll have eight snow statues, if you keep them standing out there much longer."

The boys stepped into the warm, fragrant kitchen. Sunny Boy sniffed and Nelson sniffed and Oliver sniffed. Um, um, there was something delicious cooking on that stove.

It was Mr. Camp who had spoken of the snow statues and when the boys were finally in the room he said they looked like snowmen, after all.

"Just take off your coats and shake them," directed Mr. Camp. "I'll sweep the snow out.

Mother is used to snow and it won't hurt her floor a mite. Are you hungry?"

Were they hungry? Why, Marshall Wayne was going so near to the frying pan sizzling on the kitchen range that Lex pulled him back in a hurry. He was really afraid Marshall might forget his manners and help himself before he was asked.

"We've been snowed in since yesterday afternoon," explained Lex. "Our ice-boat landed on the rocks. We haven't had any supper or any breakfast, except a crumb of chocolate."

"Gracious, and now it's noon time!" Mrs. Camp exclaimed. "You sit right down and rest yourselves and I'll hurry up dinner."

She made them sit down in a half circle before the grateful heat from the stove and then she bustled about, setting the table in the center of the large kitchen and sending her husband down to the cellar for more butter and a can of tomatoes, apple pies, and more eggs.

"I haven't got much," she apologized when

she had cut a stack of bread that reached half way to the ceiling—so Charlie Wayne insisted—and had placed a huge plate of ham and fried eggs before her husband at the head of the table, “but there’s plenty, such as it is. Come and sit down and don’t be afraid to ask for anything you want.”

Well, Sunny Boy had eaten ham and eggs before, but not even the good things Harriet cooked for him ever tasted as that breakfast did—they *would* call it breakfast, though the Camps said it was dinner and showed them the kitchen clock that said half-past twelve. Bread and butter disappeared like magic, Mrs. Camp had to fry more eggs; Marshall Wayne drank three glasses of milk. Finally Mrs. Camp felt a trifle alarmed, perhaps, for she looked at her husband anxiously.

“Pa,” she said, “you don’t think they could make themselves sick, do you? I mean is there any danger of folks eating too much? That’s an awful little boy to eat three pieces of pie.”

Lex Davis frowned at Nelson Baker.

“Don’t give him any more pie,” he said sternly. “We couldn’t get a doctor for you, Nelson, no matter what happened to you; so take my advice and stop eating for a while. But I never,” added Lex reflectively, “tasted such good pie in my life.”

Mrs. Camp laughed and began to clear away the dishes. She said it did her heart good to see hungry boys eat.

The kitchen windows rattled as the wind tore at them and the snow was beating against the house in such wild whirls that the boys could not see the barns, though Mr. Camp assured them that they were not more than six rods away.

“Our telephone wires are down,” he told the boys. “There won’t be any one through to fix ’em till this lets up—there’s no use even trying to break a road as long as it keeps snowing.”

It was plain that they would have to spend the night in the farmhouse, and Mrs. Camp, as soon as her dishes were done, began to plan what

bedrooms to give them. She would cheerfully have let them tramp into her cherished "spare room," but Lex, who knew how his own mother liked to keep her "guest room" in perfect order for her company, said no, that they could camp out anywhere.

"After last night, we could sleep in the barn and be comfortable," Lex declared.

But Mrs. Camp said she would not have any guests of hers sleeping in the barn. She had two smaller bedrooms at the back of the house and these would be all right, when she had built a fire and brought out quilts and blankets.

"I'll have to get more firewood," said Mr. Camp.

Lex and Charlie went out with him to the woodshed, but though the other boys wanted to go, too, Lex said that they had done enough for that day and that, anyway, their coats were not dry yet, which was perfectly true.

"How would you like to make some molasses candy?" said Mrs. Camp to Sunny Boy. "It's

about time we had some molasses candy—I was saying so to Pa only the other day.”

So when Mr. Camp and Lex and Charlie staggered into the kitchen with their arms filled with wood for the stoves, they found Sunny Boy and the other lads deep in the delightful sticky mystery of making molasses candy.

The storm increased as night came on, and Mr. Camp went out and milked and fed the stock at five o'clock and made everything snug for a long, cold night. He reported that the drifts were as high as the fences and he gave it as his opinion that it would be several days before any of the roads were broken enough for teams to come through.

The boys were quite ready to go to bed early after another bountiful meal—indeed, Sunny Boy went to sleep sitting in his chair and listening to Mr. Camp tell how he had been lost in a blizzard when he was a boy.

Upstairs there was a fire roaring in the little round stove in each room and beds and cots and

blankets had been crowded in so that it reminded Charlie Wayne of a dormitory in a boys' school.

It didn't remind Sunny Boy of anything. He sat down on the edge of a cot and promptly crashed into the softest of pillows and went to sleep. Handy Lee and Lex had to take his shoes off for him and when they rolled him in a blanket he merely grunted a satisfied little grunt.

"I never saw a boy go to sleep as quick as you do," Nelson Baker told him in the morning.

"Well, he may go to sleep quickly, but I notice he can get up without fussing," said Lex Davis pointedly.

Nelson did hate to get up in the morning. Even at home in his nice warm house he grumbled often when his mother called him. Now this morning there was no fire in the stove and the bedroom was fearfully cold. If Nelson had had his way he would have snuggled down under the blankets and taken another nap; but Lex was stamping around and Sunny Boy had his

shoes laced and Oliver Dunlap was insisting that he smelled breakfast.

It certainly was cold. By the time the boys were all up and ready to go downstairs, the ends of their fingers were stinging. They had tried to see out of the windows, but the glass was plastered with a frosty film that was thicker than any curtain. There was a small mountain of snow on the floor under the one window that Lex had insisted must be raised a little to give them air through the night.

"It's stopped snowing," Mrs. Camp told them, as they trooped into her warm kitchen. "Pa is just going out to milk—it's dreadfully cold; maybe you'd better not go out."

But they were wild to get out and see what there was to be seen, and so they bundled into their coats and caps and boots and followed Mr. Camp and his rattling milk pails out to the barn.

They had to break a trail through the deepest snow Sunny Boy had ever seen. Indeed, the only way he could get along—he was shorter

than any of the others—was to put his feet into the steps Handy Lee made first. Handy Lee had nice big feet, as he said himself, and he purposely made his steps close together so that Sunny Boy could step into the holes he made for him.

The barn was dry and warm and the three horses and two cows were plainly glad to see company. Mr. Camp milked, declining all offers of assistance, but he did say that if some of them would feed "Mother's" hens, she would be grateful for that help. Sunny Boy and Nelson took the measure of cracked corn and wheat and struggled out to the hen yard. They fed the biddies inside the henhouse because there was a dirt floor there and the grains would not be lost. Later in the morning they came back and gathered the eggs for Mrs. Camp.

In spite of all their kind host and hostess's efforts, the time dragged. They had breakfast and then Lex suggested that they get out and shovel paths; so for a couple of hours they

worked making trails to the barn, to the hen-house, to the corn crib and to the toolhouse and the windmill. Mr. Camp and Lex and Charlie did most of the work, for the shovels were too heavy for the younger boys to handle. They contented themselves with snowball fights and getting the eggs and shelling corn. Sunny Boy was fascinated by the corn sheller and Handy Lee was told off by Mr. Camp to keep an eye on the machine as long as Sunny Boy turned the handle.

“You can’t be too careful where there is a boy and a machine working together,” said the farmer wisely.

But after dinner at half past twelve, the long afternoon stretched out before them. Sunny Boy wondered about his mother and daddy and Harriet and Toby—whether the mail carrier had telephoned, whether his mother was still worrying about him or knew that he was safe.

Then he wondered about his sled—his beautiful red sled that he had scarcely used at all.

Sunny Boy was afraid that Jack Spratt might have broken it when he dropped it through the hole in the roof of the shack. Or if the snow had beaten in upon it, the runners must be rusted by now. Next to seeing his family, Sunny Boy was most anxious to get back to Centronia to see in what condition he would find his sled.

"I'm afraid the poor birds will have a hard time of it," said Mrs. Camp, glancing out at the heavy gray sky when dinner was over. "It looks like more snow and they won't be able to get anything to eat."

"My mother puts out suet for the birds," said Oliver Dunlap.

"I do that, too," Mrs. Camp admitted. "But I'm thinking more of the wild birds now—the game birds that won't come up to the house. I wonder, Pa, if the boys couldn't take out some wheat and corn and set it up in the north pasture?"

The boys were only too anxious to do anything that promised them action and they lis-

tened eagerly while Mr. Camp explained to them how to set up a bundle of corn sheaves in the field and husk the ears of corn so that the birds could easily get the kernels. He showed them, too, how to stand up a sheaf of wheat, and he gave Sunny Boy a measure of buckwheat to carry and told him to sweep a bare place on the ground if he could and scatter the grain.

It was great fun plunging in and out of the drifts, and Lex Davis said he thought he'd go to the north pole on the very next expedition that set out. He could tell every one he was an experienced explorer after this.

"I thought Sunny Boy was coming," said Nelson Baker when they reached the pasture bars, the top rail just showing through a drift.

"Good grief, he *did* come!" Lex groaned. "Where is he now?"

CHAPTER XV

HOME AT LAST

PERHAPS Sunny Boy's frozen to death," said Marshall Wayne anxiously.

"You're the most cheerful little candle I ever saw trying to light up a gloomy world," Lex informed him scornfully. "Didn't any of you kids see Sunny Boy? Seems to me you could sing out when you saw him disappear."

"But, Lex, we didn't see him disappear!" replied Handy Lee earnestly. "Honest, Lex, we didn't see him disappear! Did we, fellows?"

In spite of his anxiety, Lex laughed.

"I don't suppose you did," he admitted. "Wait—I'll whistle."

He whistled shrilly, but no sound answered him.

Then Charlie Wayne tried. Then all the boys

shouted together. There was no answering call.

"Now he couldn't fall off the rim of the world," said Lex sensibly, "because we are not near the edge. And it's hardly likely he was kidnapped. Charles, what do you think?"

"We-ell," Charlie drawled thoughtfully, "he's always in such dead earnest about everything he does and he works so hard at everything, I rather think he has marched off by himself. Last I saw of him he was carrying the measure as though it was made of glass, and he was struggling along with his head bent. He may have thought he was following us and instead got on the wrong track."

"Yes, that could have happened," agreed Lex. "I suppose I should have tied the crowd together. If we ever get home I'm going to sing a song in praise of mothers and dads who keep track of their children. I don't see how they do it."

In spite of his joking, Lex was worried. He said that Charlie Wayne and the other boys

should stay where they were and go to work fixing the grain for the birds, and he would go back and try to find Sunny Boy.

"You stay here until you hear me call," Lex instructed Charlie. "If you don't hear me within twenty minutes or half an hour, and you have the corn shucks fixed, start back for the house. Mr. Camp will know what to do next."

Lex watched the footsteps made in the snow closely as he tramped back. He had gone perhaps half the way when he saw a little fork in the path—there were steps leading off in another direction.

"Charlie was right," said Lex aloud. "Sunny Boy did branch off. But those aren't his steps—they are twice as large as his feet!"

However, Lex decided Sunny Boy must have walked in the larger foot prints and he decided to follow them. And, ten minutes later, having mounted what was probably a rise in the pasture in the summer time and on this winter day was a hill high enough to shut a part of the pasture

from sight, Lex saw something that made him stand perfectly still.

Sunny Boy—looking very small and lonely in all that expanse of snow—stood surrounded by a flock of bright-eyed snow birds. He had thrown out some of his grain and there was enough crust on the snow to bear the birds and to keep the buckwheat from sinking in. As Lex watched, Sunny Boy flung out another handful of grain and more birds came fluttering through the air and settled around him.

Lex whistled softly.

“Oh, Lex!” Sunny Boy was so glad to see him that he shouted and the birds flew away in quick alarm.

“Give them a little more and then come on,” called Lex. “You’ve upset my nerves for the rest of the day, getting up your own north pole party.”

But he grinned and Sunny Boy knew he was really very glad to find him.

“I thought I was right behind Nelson,” ex-

plained Sunny Boy, after he had scattered most of the buckwheat in the measure and was plodding along beside Lex, hopping in and out of the steps already made in the snow. "Then when I looked up there wasn't anybody at all!"

"You got sidetracked," said Lex. "Some farmer has been through here and, holding your head down as you did, you merely stepped over into his footprints. I'll whistle for the rest of the boys."

He gave a piercing whistle and Charlie's signal answered him. The boys came running and jumping down the trail they had made and when they saw Sunny Boy they beamed upon him. He and Lex had to tell them what had happened.

"What would you have done if Lex hadn't found you?" asked Nelson Baker.

"But he did," Sunny Boy answered. "How do I know what I would have done if he didn't find me when he did?"

"You would have gone on, following the

tracks, and they would have taken you somewhere," said Handy Lee. "There must have been a man to make the tracks since it stopped snowing, and he must have gone somewhere."

"Well, we're going somewhere, too," Lex declared. "We're going back to the farmhouse. Sunny Boy, if you dare get out of my sight until we reach the doorstep, I'll bury you in the nearest drift up to your neck."

Sunny Boy laughed, but he kept rather close to Lex for all that. He had no desire to be lost a second time.

Mr. Camp was just starting out to do "the chores," as he called the milking and the feeding of the horses and cows for the night, when they reached the farmhouse, and they all went out to the barn where they pitched down hay and measured out corn and got the feed for the chickens and then gathered the eggs from the nests in the henhouse.

"I declare, I was telling Mother this afternoon that I wished we had eight boys of our

own," said Mr. Camp. "We could make things hum on this place if you stayed up here and didn't go home at all."

But Sunny Boy thought he wouldn't like that. No, sir, he wanted his mother and daddy and his own house and Harriet and Toby. Not to mention his sled. Not even the fun of popping corn after the wonderful hot supper Mrs. Camp cooked for them had been eaten could make Sunny Boy forget his sled. He buttered the corn and sprinkled salt on it and he took his turn shaking the popper and looked as though he was thinking of nothing else. But in his mind he was coasting down Abbot Hill and, yes, winning a race from Jack Spratt.

"I know my sled could beat his," said Sunny Boy to himself, as an hour later he toiled sleepily up to bed.

Handy Lee woke them all up the next morning by shouting that the sun was out! Sure enough, it was, and the scene from the bedroom windows was so dazzling that Sunny Boy said

it reminded him of ice cream and diamonds.

"They'll break the roads to-day," said Mr. Camp, smiling at the boys as they burst into the kitchen a few minutes later and made the pewter plates on the kitchen dresser do a little war dance.

"When they get the roads open, we can go to the station, can't we?" Nelson Baker suggested.

"I'll take you over just as soon as I think a team can make it," promised Mr. Camp. "I know you're wild to get home and your folks must be anxious to see you. Mother and I understand, and we won't keep you one minute longer than it's necessary."

The boys found it hard to keep from singing and dancing all through the time they spent helping Mr. Camp at the barn and even when they were seated at the breakfast table. It seemed so wonderful to be able to talk about going home!

"And the first thing you do," said Charlie Wayne to his brother, "is to march up to Mr.

Lambert and tell what you know about Sunny Boy's sled."

"Aw, Charlie, why?" Marshall begged. "I don't see why I have to tell him—Jack Spratt will be so mad."

"He won't be half as mad as I'll be if you try to crawl out," warned Charlie. "That sled was taken out of the furnace room which is school property. You had no business to touch it and you know it as well as I do. If you don't tell, Handy will."

Handy Lee nodded.

"I hate telling tales," he said. "But Jack can't get away with a thing like that. It was a school race and Sunny Boy lost it on a foul—at least, I'd call cheating like that a foul."

Marshall grumbled, but he knew that he would have to do as his brother said.

As a matter of fact he did—the day after they were back in Centronia he went to the principal and told him his share in the theft. Mr. Lambert said it was stealing, though Marshall was

shocked and so was Jack Spratt when they heard him say that. Mr. Lambert was very angry and at first he announced that he would tell the entire school what had happened. Then, later, he decided that would hardly be fair to Marshall, who had not really intended to steal the sled, but who had been too weak to speak up when he saw what Jack Spratt planned to do.

“Jack is out of athletics for the season—that means till June,” said Mr. Lambert finally. “And, Marshall, you’ll have to give up your monitorship.”

Jack Spratt was captain of the baseball team for his class and nothing Mr. Lambert could have said or done to him could mean more severe punishment. He could not play baseball all spring and of course it was not long before every boy in the school knew the reason. As for Marshall Wayne, he had liked to be monitor, for they had a number of privileges—they could come five minutes late to class and leave five minutes early because they had to watch the

other children march through the corridors. Now Marshall would have no special privileges or honors.

But this, of course, happened after the boys were safely home. It was perhaps an hour after Charlie had told Marshall what he must do that the sound of sleigh bells sent every one scurrying to the front windows.

"It's a lumber sled!" exclaimed Mr. Camp. "That's Fine driving. Who are those men with him, Mother? Guess they're strangers."

But they were not strangers to Sunny Boy nor to Handy Lee or Lex Davis.

"It's Daddy!" shrieked Sunny Boy.

"Daddy!" bellowed Handy Lee who had a tremendous voice for a boy of his size.

"Uncle Sam!" shouted Lex Davis eagerly.

Out into the snow tumbled eight laughing, yelling youngsters. Mr. Fine, who owned the sled and the team, laughed and Mr. Horton and Mr. Lee held up their hands in protest at the noise.

“Did the mail carrier telephone?” asked Sunny Boy, trying to hop on the sled.

“He certainly did and he relieved just seven mothers who were having fits,” Mr. Horton answered.

“Not to mention seven dads,” said Mr. Lee slyly.

There were other teams coming through now, with crews of men working busily. Mr. Camp asked them all in for dinner and Mrs. Camp, who loved company, beamed when twenty-four sat down at her two tables. Soon after that the boys and their fathers were taken over to the railroad station on one of the sleds and an hour later Mrs. Horton and Harriet and Toby were sitting in a circle around Sunny Boy, listening to his experiences and interrupting him every other minute to ask him if he was sure he had not taken cold.

Toby didn't ask questions, of course. But he went coasting the next day with Sunny Boy. The sled wasn't even scratched, and Sunny Boy

and his daddy had it out of the old shack before they went to bed that night. The very next afternoon, as soon as school was out, Sunny Boy and Toby and Nelson went down Abbot Hill and Oliver Dunlap and Jimmie Butterworth were the next passengers.

"I like winter better than any other time of year," said Sunny Boy joyfully, and Toby, taking the rope of the sled in his mouth, ran all the way up the hill to show that he, too, approved of winter sports.

THE END

The further adventures of Sunny Boy are related in the next volume of this series entitled Sunny Boy at Willow Farm.

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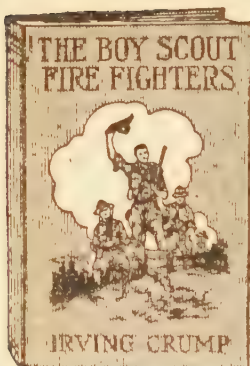
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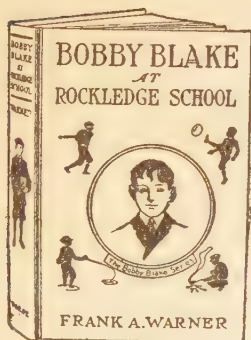
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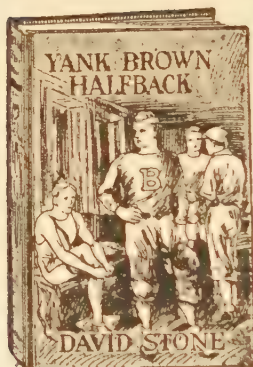
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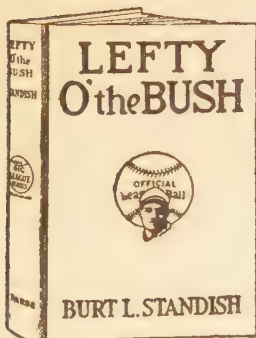
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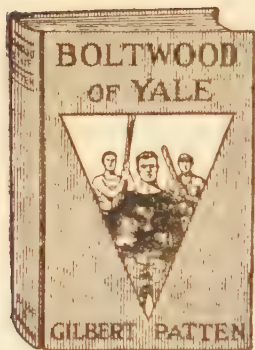
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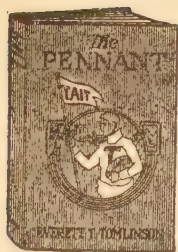
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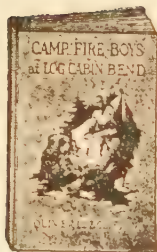
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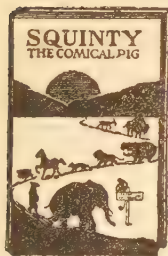
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